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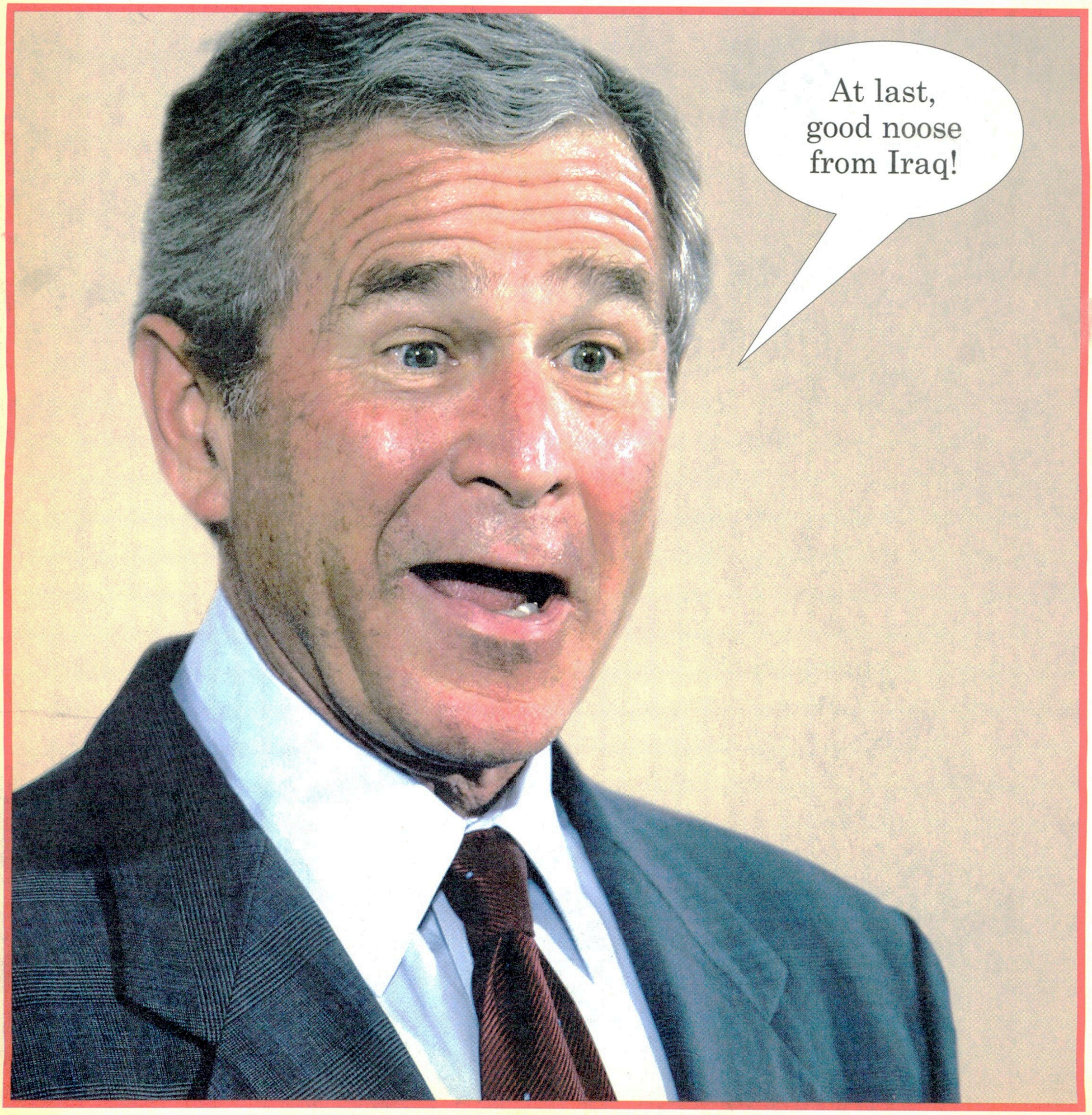
SADDAM TO HANG



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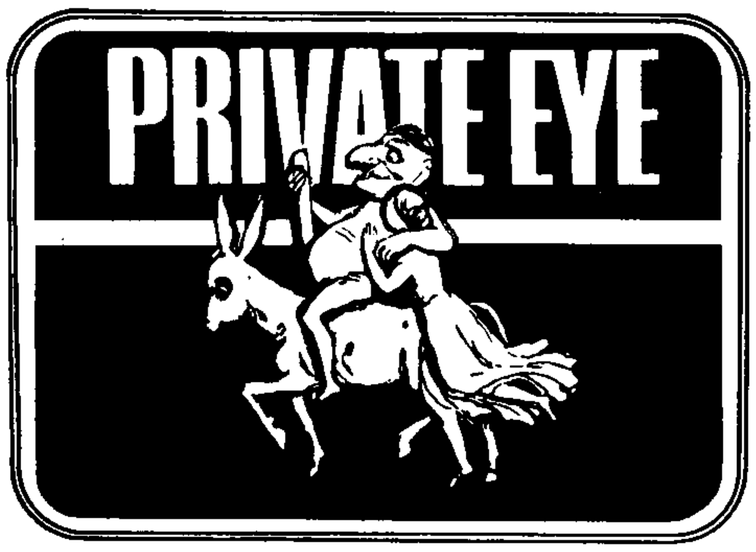
†Charge for text will be at users' normal network rate.



Gallows humour

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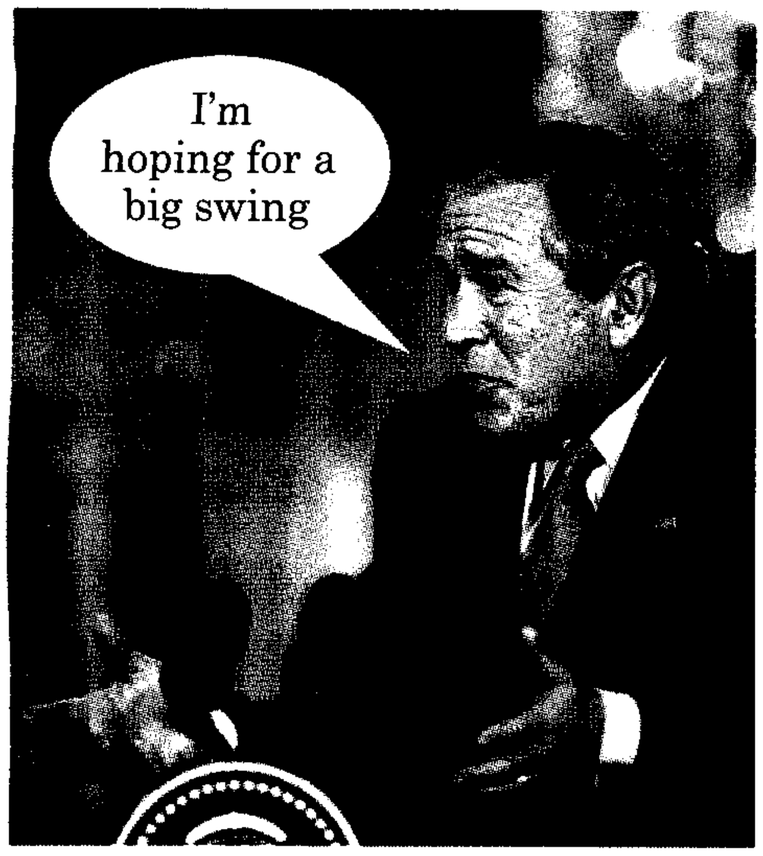
SADDAM VERDICT TO GIVE BUSH ELECTION BOOST



JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

December 2005: Foreign Office announces progress towards its "public service agreement target" of "an increase in the number of countries that have abolished the death penalty, or announced a moratorium in its use". "We believe that the abolition of the death penalty is essential to protect human dignity, and to the progressive development of human rights."

November 2006: Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett announces that "I welcome that Saddam Hussein and the other defendants have faced justice and have been held to account for their crimes. Appalling crimes were committed by Saddam Hussein's regime. It is right that those accused of such crimes against the Iraqi people should face Iraqi justice."

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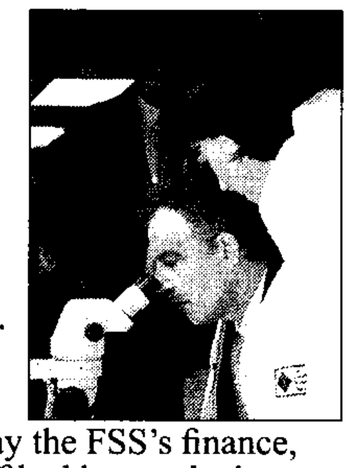
ABC

DURING last week's Iraq debate, Tories and other opposition MPs kept saying that they wanted an inquiry similar to that held by Lord Franks into intelligence failures before the Falklands invasion.

A curious precedent to choose – since Franks's investigation is best remembered for letting the government off the hook. For although he found plenty of evidence showing culpable negligence by Margaret Thatcher and her ministers, Franks concluded: "We would not be justified in attaching any criticism or blame to the present government…" Or, as the former Labour leader Jim Callaghan said: "For 338 paragraphs he painted a splendid picture, delineated the light and the shade, and the glowing colours in it, and when Franks got to paragraph 339 he got fed up with the canvas he was painting, and chucked a bucket of whitewash over it."

Anyway, Tories who demand a rerun of Franks forget that they've already had one. When Jack Straw set up Lord Butler's inquiry, in February 2004, he announced that its modus operandi would follow the precedent established by… the Franks inquiry. And, sure enough, out came another bucket of whitewash.

AS Forensic Science Service boffins wheeled out the high-tech DNA equipment at their Lambeth laboratory to show the prime minister on 23 October *(see picture)*, their support staff could be forgiven for not getting into the spirit of the visit.



For on the very same day the FSS's finance, IT, admin and research staff had been asked to volunteer for redundancy. Since the FSS is now a "wholly-owned government company" (in preparation for being flogged off to the private sector), the redundancy terms are far less generous than they would have been when the staff were proper public employees, with pay-offs likely to be half what would have been on offer.

Tony Blair's comments congratulating "all the staff at FSS" for their "inspiring work" certainly stuck in some craws.

SO Sir John Bourn, beancounter-in-chief at the National Audit Office (NAO), has a sense of humour.

While no one has been laughing at the recent whitewashes issued by the NAO, Sir John sought to address the crisis of confidence at his senior management conference last month, presenting a slideshow in which he depicted himself as Aussie Steve Irwin (just after his death).

Threats from various "dangerous predators" such as "scrutiny over our methods in public" and "freedom of information" were identified under a photo of Irwin with a python, followed by the inevitable pictures of a stingray then a hearse (ho ho). Shame he can't be so savage when a few billion pounds of taxpayers' money are flowing down the drain...

Free entry Café on site
Delicious Ethnic cousin available
Jobs & Training Fair

"This is an architectural model of how it'll look"

OUTRAGE at the Olympic Development Association over the spin given to the hasty departure of non-executive chairman Jack Lemley. His "resignation" was reported as a disaster for the ODA, implying that the high profile American was the only one who could ensure the project was delivered on time.

That could not be further from the truth. Lemley, it emerges, was an embarrassing liability who had made several faux-pas and who seemed greatly interested in feathering his own nest.

Brought in as a consultant by Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell at £1,000 per day, Lemley seemed not to understand the difference between a non-executive and executive role. First, he spent ages commissioning work from unauthorised suppliers to do up his office, stopped only by the intervention of ODA chief executive David Higgins. Then he showed great interest in recruiting an obscure company in San Diego, Fishtank, to design the website. It turned out to be run by a relative.

The last straw was Lemley's approach to Metronet, the Tube infrastructure company. Lemley offered his services to sort out problems in delivering its massive PPP contract with the London Underground. However, Metronet is part-owned by Balfour Beatty, which was part of a consortium bidding to be partner with the ODA, a clear conflict of interest. To its credit Metronet showed him the door.

London mayor Ken Livingstone and Jowell realised the ODA was heading for disaster under Lemley and apparently managed to persuade him to resign. He was supposed to keep quiet about his departure but blabbed to his local paper, the *Idaho Statesman*, and the London *Evening Standard* somehow picked up the story. The excuse from friends is that Lemley had had a stroke which affected his judgement, "which was all very sad". For him, yes; but not necessarily for the ODA and London, as the coverage suggested.

TYRANT'S LAST APPEAL

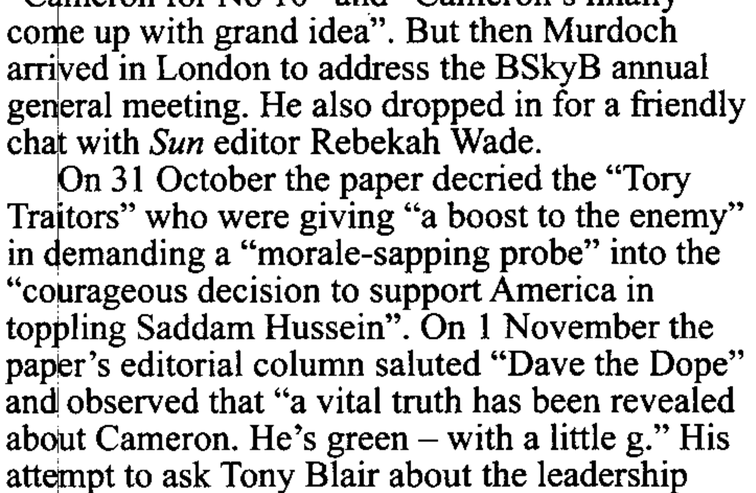
Street of Shame

INTERVIEWED on American TV in July, Rupert Murdoch declared himself "undecided" on the topic of David Cameron.

Last week, the *Sun* ran the headlines "Cameron for No 10" and "Cameron's finally come up with grand idea". But then Murdoch arrived in London to address the BSkyB annual general meeting. He also dropped in for a friendly chat with *Sun* editor Rebekah Wade.

On 31 October the paper decried the "Tory Traitors" who were giving "a boost to the enemy" in demanding a "morale-sapping probe" into the "courageous decision to support America in toppling Saddam Hussein". On 1 November the paper's editorial column saluted "Dave the Dope" and observed that "a vital truth has been revealed about Cameron. He's green – with a little g." His attempt to ask Tony Blair about the leadership succession was noted on 2 November beneath the headline "Cam a Cropper". And on 3 November the Conservative leader rounded off what the *Sun* called his "week of woe" by going "Green for Doh!" by asking readers to "love a lout". " Nice thought, Dave," sneered an editorial. "But before we start offering hugs and kisses, let's get those gangs off our streets… Once again Mr Cameron looks green behind the ears."

Could Rupert possibly have made up his mind?



"There's never a lout to love when you want one"

AFTER long months of planning, the *Times* launched its big autumn promotion with a front-page fanfare last Monday: "A Flight to Europe for Every Reader. Start collecting airmiles today. Only tax to pay."

Alas! This turned out to be the very day on which Sir Nicholas Stern published his report. By the next morning, with the *Times*'s lead story noting that airline passengers "will bear the brunt of green tax levies", the promotional hype had been reduced from a fanfare to an almost inaudible murmur.

The Dirty Digger won't be pleased. He has been converted to greenery by his son James, boss of BSkyB, which claims to be the first carbon-neutral FTSE 100 company. He also launched a joint TV venture with Al Gore last month. And now one of his own papers urges readers to leave their hobnailed carbon footprints all over Europe!

As if that weren't reckless enough, the *Times* compounded the offence to its owner by running an editorial contrasting Stern's sober rigour with the hyperbolic dross often provoked by this subject – "breathless depictions of climatic change in the style of *The Day After Tomorrow*". Who made *The Day After Tomorrow*? Why, the Dirty Digger, of course!

FORMER *Evening Standard* hack Christopher Monckton, aka Viscount Monckton of Brenchley, aka Dominic Lawson's brother-in-law, suddenly erupted into the *Sunday Telegraph* last week after many years' absence from journalism. His two-page piece about global warming, billed by the paper as "a highly controversial polemic", was largely incomprehensible but seemed to be saying that scientists had got it all wrong. A further instalment is promised this weekend.

Alas, the *Telegraph* gave readers no clue about who Monckton is. If they're gambling on whether the planet will go phut or not, surely they need to know the tipster's track record.

Monckton's main claim to fame in recent years was the jigsaw he designed, Eternity. So confident was he of its fiendish insolubility that he offered £1m to anyone who cracked the puzzle. Two mathematicians from Cambridge gratefully claimed the money soon afterwards, obliging the poor sap to sell his house. Since then he has restored his fortunes by producing books of Sudoku puzzles, letting out holiday cottages in Scotland and acting as an "immigration adviser" to a London-based employment firm.

In an earlier incarnation, more than 20 years ago, he worked in the policy unit at 10 Downing Street for Margaret Thatcher, where he was noted for always wearing a bowler hat to work. But even she seems to have found him a bit eccentric. In an interview with the *Sunday Times* earlier this year, he revealed a long-standing ambition to write a book calling on the world to abolish money altogether. "Margaret Thatcher was fascinated by the idea, but I didn't quite manage to persuade her that it could work," he added forlornly.

Quite how any of this qualifies him as an expert on climate change is not clear. But clearly the *Sunday Telegraph* knows better.

"BRITAIN FACES AN ARCTIC WINTER" shrieked the front page of the *Daily Express* on 1 November, over news that "long-term forecasters believe the hot summer will give way to an unusually icy winter… parts of the country in February and March could face temperatures as low as minus 10C."

It bore an astonishing resemblance to the *Express*'s front page of 27 October 2005, which promised "BIG FREEZE WILL CRIPPLE BRITAIN: COLDEST SINCE 1963; GAS COULD RUN OUT; 3-DAY WEEK LOOMS."

The subsequent winter was, according to the Met Office, "exceptionally" sunny and warmer than average.

THE relentlessly hip Telegraph group has just changed its name to Telegraph Media – to mark its move from a newspaper office to a "hub" and show it is "ready to meet the challenges of the digital age".

Who needs boring old traditional papers when you can have the downloadable thrill that is *TelegraphPM*, published on the paper's website at 4pm and 5.30pm every day? "Read it on screen or print it out to read on the way home," Sir Herbert Gussett is urged.

For all the babble about podcasts and "click 'n' carry", it seems the *Torygraph*'s crazed digerati may not be taking their readers with them. The *Daily Telegraph* – the antiquated ink-on-paper version – sells over 900,000 copies. But how many people read the heavily-hyped *TelegraphPM*? Precisely 800.

***TELEGRAPH* hacks' vote for a three-day strike this month in protest at the recent jobs cull has brought out the worst of the papers' increasingly dysfunctional management.**

Richard Ellis, the *Sunday Telegraph*'s sinister deputy editor, visited every department of his paper demanding to know who would be defying the NUJ strike and making clear that he expected them to turn up for work. His attempts at intimidation seem to have had the opposite effect, however, with hacks who aren't members of the union now planning to join their comrades at the braziers.

Ellis was perhaps not the best man to rally the troops. *Eye* readers will recall that one Friday last July, when the police were hunting for terrorists who had tried to bomb the London Underground, he chose to abandon his post to go and watch the cricket with his lover, Jacqui Fuller, the then editor of the *Sun Tel* news review pages – thus bringing production of the paper to a near-standstill on the week's busiest day!

SO farewell then, A.N. Wilson. His column in the London *Evening Standard*, a fixture at the paper since some time before the Boer War, will cease at the end of this month.

Wilson is a victim of collateral damage in the great London newspaper war, which has obliged the *Standard* to cut costs. "Times have changed and we have to face the new realities," editor Veronica Wadley explained in a letter on 23 October. "All contracts, even with our most loyal and long-serving contributors like you, are being renegotiated." She offered the enticing prospect of doing the same work for "considerably less money" – an invitation Wilson declined.

Still, at least he's leaving her something to remember him by. On 20 October, referring to the McCartneys, he wrote that in celebrity divorce cases "I personally always support Anthony Julius clients against Payne Hicks Beach clients, since Julius championed the People's Princess against her horrible little husband."

This provoked an instant libel writ from Fiona Shackleton of Payne Hicks Beach, divorce lawyer to Prince Charles and Paul McCartney. So the money saved on Wilson's fees may end up in the pockets of m'learned friends instead.

EXPRESS Newspapers' £1m-a-week chairman Richard "Dirty" Desmond is to "outsource" yet more of his crumbling journalistic empire. City hacks on the *Express* are to be sacked and their work done by PA up in that hotbed of City news, Howden, Yorkshire.

The travel sections are also moving to outside agencies as Desmond seeks to cut costs across the titles, merging departments and slashing casual shifts. The editorial team at the *Sunday Express* is to be cut by 20 percent leaving just 16 staff to produce a national Sunday title. In all, 55 staff are in the fast lane to redundancy in time for Christmas. Dirty Des's ultimate aim, it seems, is the age-old press baron's dream of producing newspapers without employing any hacks at all.

Meanwhile, despite his papers' staunch support for law 'n' order, the proprietor has been caught by Inspector Knacker using the bus lanes of the capital to speed himself to urgent business meetings. Having instructed his chauffeur to swing the Rolls out of stationary traffic and get his foot down, Desmond hid behind his copy of the *Daily Express* as his red-faced driver gave his details to the policeman.

"I'm fed up of telling him not to drive in the bus lanes," piped up the chairman sympathetically from the back seat.

That Desmond can now afford to swan around in a new £300,000 Roller may owe something to the huge wads he continues to make from phone-entry competitions which offer readers second, third or even fourth-hand VW campervans as prizes. These are picked up dirt cheap at auction; and a recent email reminded staff that, should the need arise to buy another such vehicle, a copy of *VW Camper and Bus* magazine was in the top drawer on the news desk.

The latest "prize" collected by a no doubt ecstatic winner was in fact a classic Mini Cooper – a car owned by a member of the news desk who had been unable to flog it.

THE *Daily Mirror*'s TV critic Jane Simon pronounced herself unimpressed by singer George Michael's dope-smoking appearance on the *South Bank Show*. "Sorry – are we meant to be shocked by George Michael sparking up a joint before his concert in Madrid?"

Well, one newspaper certainly appeared to be, devoting its entire front-page on 20 October to a series of stills from the documentary – or as they put it, "EXCLUSIVE SENSATIONAL PICTURES: GEORGE MICHAEL ON DRUGS".

Which one? The *Daily Mirror*.

BLACKWATCH: LIES, LIES, LIES

ALTHOUGH he doesn't own the Telegraph titles any more, Conrad Black still has loyal defenders there. One, it seems, is Sunday Telegraph editor Patience Wheatcroft, who gave Black a full page of her paper on 29 October for a rant against his new biographer, Tom Bower, headed "Lies, Lies, Lies".

When Bower asked if he could reply, Wheatcroft said the most she was willing to consider was a 150-word letter – despite the fact that Black's blizzard of accusations against him ran to more than 1,600 words. Does she really think Black's article was accurate? Quotes from the blustering baron are in bold – followed by a few inconvenient facts that he and the *Torygraph* choose to ignore.

"Bower's claim to have known me since the 1980s refers to our one meeting, of 30 seconds, in 1987."

Alas! Bower's book, *Conrad & Lady Black: Dancing on the Edge*, includes a charming photo taken at Lord Rothermere's Christmas party in 2002, in which Black is sharing a joke with Max Hastings and, er, Tom Bower. They have met on several other occasions – including a two-hour dinner at Black's north London house in 1987.

"At the worst moment of the financial assault on me by the US government, a friend and I canvassed some other friends about possible (well-secured) loans to deal with a personal liquidity crisis American prosecutors were causing… As it has turned out, I was able to refinance some assets and have been able to bear the very heavy legal bills. I will see this through and ask no one to fight my battles for me."

Black's legendary memory is letting him down once again. Although he boasts that he has borne the heavy legal costs, in fact 75 percent of the bills from his criminal case are being paid by Hollinger International through its insurance policies.

"Bower's portrayal of my youth and family was an astonishing farrago of snide falsehoods. My parents' home did not have legions of domestic help, was far from a 'loveless atmosphere'; there were no 'all-night sessions' with my father, when I was a child or afterwards, and never a 'lecture' from him on 'supremacy and manipulation'."

Where could Bower have got such a mistaken impression? Possibly from Conrad's autobiography, *A Life in Progress*, where as early as page 3 he writes of the loveless atmosphere at his childhood home. His parents were "an improbable pair", he reveals: "It was never obvious to me… what they had in common." There were "saddening conjugal abrasions", as his mother went to bed after dinner while his father sat up all night. As for the paternal "lectures", Conrad spoke about these to his first biographer, Peter Newman – and mentioned them in his own memoirs!

"He [Black's father] retired voluntarily, contrary to Bower's version, from his position in the brewing industry, because he did not agree with the policies of the controlling shareholders."

George Black did not retire voluntarily from his brewing company. He was fired in his mid-40s for alcoholism and provoking industrial unrest which threatened the company's profits. In his autobiography (p.148) Conrad wrote that his father "had never been very pleased about the unceremonious manner in which he left Canadian Breweries".

"I went to school in car-pools with neighbours, and never once in a Cadillac, as in Bower's fictional account."

Black's old schoolfriend John Fraser, now the head of Massey college in Toronto, confirms that he saw Conrad arriving daily in a chauffeur-driven Cadillac.

"My academic career did not end in failed law exams. I graduated well enough in law and also took an MA."

On pages 32 and 33 of his autobiography Conrad describes what actually happened in the summer of 1966: "I failed the majority of the subjects, was not allowed to write the supplementals and, for good measure, was expelled from the faculty and effectively barred from the study of law in Ontario." However, Black later retook the law exams and passed – as Bower notes in his book.

"It is true that I had a sleepless night shortly before my law graduation. It is utterly false that, as Bower tells us, I 'was on the verge, some believed, of committing suicide – the accumulation of his loveless childhood, his academic failure, and his social insecurity had become an intolerable burden'. None of them actually occurred, so they could not have been onerous. 'One diagnosis suggested a narcissistic personality disorder,' Bower alleges. I have never had a psychiatric diagnosis, other than the assurance of my supervisor, when I was briefly a candidate-psychoanalyst, that I was not neurotic. The GP for the English-speaking students in my French language law faculty gave me a sleeping pill, and told me to have a glass of whiskey. I took his advice, and it worked."

Once again, Conrad really ought to consult his own autobiography. On p.52 he writes: "I began to experience worrisome symptoms of tension. Indigestion, claustrophobia… fitful sleep, sudden attacks of perspiring and even hyper-ventilating… I was shaking violently… It was more terrifying than anything else I have known." A page later, he reveals: "What was recommended was psychoanalysis… I entered into an analytical programme in September 1971." He then describes his two and a half years of treatment: "The inexorable success of the analytic process was gratifying as well as intriguing as I came gradually to recognise and reduce the sources of the occasional vulnerability to anxiety." He even boasts that in recognition of his suffering and treatment, "I became a patron of mental health causes, especially the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry in Toronto."

"My wife [Barbara Amiel] never took it upon herself to commandeer an aircraft, much less suggest the acquisition of one. The company had had one since it was founded; and when we were doing business in hundreds of communities, many of them fairly inaccessible, it leased a second one, but they were not used frivolously."

This doesn't quite tally with the 2004 report from a special committee of Hollinger International, presided over by former SEC chairman Richard Breeden. Among many examples, it cited Black's use of the corporate jet for a 10-day holiday with Barbara in Bora Bora – at a cost to the company of more than $250,000. As Black himself admitted in an email to former Hollinger executive Peter Atkinson in August 2002: "There has not been an occasion for many months when I got on our plane without wondering whether it was really affordable. But I'm not prepared to re-enact the French Revolutionary renunciation of the rights of nobility. We are proprietors, after all, beleaguered though we may be."

"I do not own any toy soldiers."

In September 2003 the *National Post* interviewed Conrad's lifelong friend and former business associate Hal Jackman. "The two men have long shared a passion for history and a keen interest in the great military leaders of the past," it reported. "Mr Jackman sizes up the situation in military terms, just as he did many years ago when he and Mr Black would spend hours together playing war games with antique toy soldiers. He suspects that, like Napoleon, Mr Black may have finally pushed the limits of his power too far."

"I never referred to Canada disparagingly."

Pretty rich from a man who loves his country so much that he renounced his Canadian citizenship merely so he could call himself Lord Black of Crossharbour. Here are a couple of Conrad's observations about his homeland:

"There is almost universal dissatisfaction with both the institutions and personalities of Canadian public life and Canada's confidence and complacency of the past has given way to demoralisation and alarm. The missing ingredients in the Canadian puzzle, in my judgment, are a durable *raison d'être* for the country." (*Financial Post*, Toronto, May 1992.)

"My associates and I became concerned that it would be imprudent not to reduce our exposure to the newspaper business, to debt, and to Canada… My native country, in commercial terms, had for me become not an opportunity, nor even a nationality susceptible to reason, but a trap… Canadian citizenship was merely an impediment to my progress." (Speech in November 2001, explaining why he became a British citizen.)

Neither my wife's jewellery nor our house in Palm Beach is for sale.

This will surprise Linda Gary Real Estate, the Florida estate agency which is trying to find a buyer for his Palm Beach house at an asking price of $35m. The agency confirmed to the *Eye* last week that the mansion is indeed for sale. As for the jewels, he must have forgotten that as recently as 10 October a Chicago judge ordered US marshals to "promptly" serve Conrad and Barbara with a restraining order prohibiting them from selling or compromising the value of a 26-carat diamond ring, which he bought for her in November 2000 for $2.6m. Judge Amy St Eve said she found "reasonable cause" to issue a restraining order to "preserve" the ring and other items of jewellery

"The *Mail* reports that I have been 'disgraced' in London, a frequent throw-away line in the press there, and Bower writes of a 'familiar tale of a tycoon's rise and fall'. I don't think so. I have not been disgraced."

Of course not. True, in February 2004 Judge Leo Strine of Delaware concluded that Black was a "cunning and calculated" liar, whose behaviour amounted to "what, in the old days, might have been called constructive fraud"; and Hollinger's own investigation accused him of running a "corporate kleptocracy". But for a man with no sense of shame this is clearly not a disgrace.

"It was obvious from early on that, illogical though it was, this episode would probably go to a trial. 'So foul a sky clears not without a storm.' All I have ever asked was a fair trial. I expect to receive one and have no doubt of its outcome."

It is often forgotten, as Bower's book records, that in November 2003 Black admitted in a signed agreement that he had wrongly taken $7.2m from Hollinger, and promised to repay it. (He then reneged on the agreement.) His veteran associate David Radler also signed the agreement, repaid the money and has since pleaded guilty to theft. At his trial, Black will have to explain why – after much discussion and legal advice – he signed that agreement. He'll also have to cope with the confession from Radler, who will be giving evidence against him. Other prosecution witnesses are expected to include Henry Kissinger, Marie Jose Kravis, Richard Perle and Richard Burt – all of whom will testify that Black lied to them.

"I have a year to act on libels in the UK. Our legal case will be heard in Chicago, starting in March 2007. At the end of it, when I have been acquitted, those who have defamed me may then look forward to their own days in court, defending the indefensible."

See you in court, matey!

JACK STRAW's decision to bung MPs £6.5m a year towards their (unaudited) postage costs was opposed by Hendon's Labour MP Andrew Dismore. Not because he thought it extravagant – Dismore wanted more than twice as much money for his stamps!

The MP's contribution to a Commons debate on "Legislative Process" was one of the more bizarre, self-congratulatory speeches ever heard in the House. He spoke at length about how hard he worked and how his constituents really loved receiving his letters. In fact, taking parliamentary time to quote from his correspondence, it seemed some of them can't get enough of his missives.

Dismore is known chiefly for a record-making 197-minute filibuster in 2005 which talked out a private member's bill aimed at giving householders rights against intruders (for the record, he's a personal injuries lawyer). If his £25,146 claim for postage last year is be believed, he sent out 612 letters for every day parliament sat.

During the recent debate, Tory Robert Walter wondered how Dismore physically managed to send so many letters. "On Monday I signed 350 letter and it took me an hour. I have a fast signature."

Straw's new deal will limit MPs to about £10,000 each on stamps, so the poor people of Hendon are somehow going to have to cope with fewer than 300 letters a day from their MP. A sacrifice indeed – but tough choices have to be made!

MID-BEDFORDSHIRE's gobby Tory MP, Nadine Dorries (*Eye* 1169) – affectionately known as "Mad Nad" to her constituents – may have shot her mouth off once too often.

She is facing a libel action from Peter May, director of the National Institute for Research Into Acquatic Habitats (Nirah), over remarks she made about him on BBC TV's *The Politics Show*. M'learned friends are also studying emails in which Ms Dorries is alleged to have suggested that she would not trust Mr May to design her garden shed. As he is a senior corporate financial adviser in the City of London, this did not go down very well.

Nirah is a sort of acquatic Eden Project, part scientific research centre, part tourist attraction, which is proposed for a group of old brick clay pits in Ms Dorries' constituency. It has a lot of support from locals, although the general enthusiasm is evidently not shared by Ms Dorries. She is backing, instead, a scheme by the US-owned Center Parcs company, which wants to build a £160m holiday village three miles away near Steppingley, which would enclose 360 acres of greenbelt land, much of it woodland, and shut off traditional rights of way. Local walkers and riders would be excluded, and be replaced by traditional country sports such as "paint ball combat" and "corporate challenge".

On Ms Dorries' website she vows to "fight to preserve… the rural way of life" and in her maiden speech to the Commons last year she said she "failed to see why… we need to develop green fields rather than existing urban areas that need regeneration". Locals are baffled, therefore, why she feels so strongly that what the green fields in her constituency need right now are 700 "villas", a hotel, a bowling alley, a cinema and a conference centre for 500 delegates built on top of them, plus swimming pools, bars, restaurants and a supermarket.

Cynics point to the fact that the land Center Parcs want to develop belongs to the Duke of Bedford, who donated more than £10,000 to the Mid-Beds Conservative party last year. But any suggestion of a connection would surely make Nad even madder!

HEALTH Minister Caroline Flint seems very keen to listen to the junk food firms as she leads the battle against obesity.

A Freedom of Information inquiry reveals that when she started her new job at the end of last year Flint had "introductory meetings" with Kellogg's, Nestlé, Cadbury's, Tesco, Asda and The British Retail Consortium, plus a "food promotion" meeting with the Food and Drink Federation. After meeting seven groups of commercial lobbyists, Flint only met two campaigners against the purveyors of junk food (one meeting with a group called TOAST and one with the National Consumers Council).

It is possible that Flint gave a tongue lashing to those who purvey sugary, salty, fatty rubbish to children. But this seems unlikely given her performance at the recent Labour party conference.

In Manchester, the Health Minister addressed a meeting paid for by food advertisers, sharing a platform with Andrew Brown of the Advertising Association, Channel Five's head of children's programming, Nick Wilson, and Tony Palmer, managing director of Kellogg's UK. Brown and Wilson warned delegates that children's television would collapse if junk food ads for kids were limited. Palmer spoke about all the good work his firm did encouraging swimming (so kids could work off all the calories from their Coco Pops). Flint nodded vigorously as these executives claimed that the food and advertising industry weren't to blame for obesity and were in any case helping to fix it.

Flint also frowned and grimaced during the one speech against the junk food industry, given by the National Consumer Council's Philip Cullum. She offered a few words about the "jigsaw" of issues and "complexities" and a "voluntary approach" to the problem. Unfortunately it looks as if the food industry has been laughing behind their backs at this "voluntary approach". When the American Centre for Science in the Public Interest examined Kellogg's ingredients, it found that the firm actually puts more sugar and salt in some of its UK breakfast cereals than it does in the US.

"I haven't seen you for about five stone"

ONE COST apparently not included in last month's government-commissioned study into the expense of operating the Freedom of Information Act was the amount of public money officials spend blocking and fighting the public's right to know.

The House of Commons has spent a relatively modest £4,464 on outside lawyers to prevent the public getting a glimpse of MPs' expense claim details. But the real cost is much higher. Internal legal advice sought by secrecy-loving bureaucrats and politicians is not included as the House of Commons Commission claims it cannot quantify internal costs.

MPs' annual expense claims totalled £86.8m this year – more than twice their total salary and pension package of £38.4m. While MPs now reluctantly provide bulk figures for categories such as travel, postage, staff and "additional costs", they have refused numerous FoI requests for a more detailed breakdown. And it's precisely the detailed receipts that are needed to fill in the "black holes" in many MPs' claims.

Information Commissioner Richard Thomas has ruled in favour of Norman Baker MP, whose request for MPs' detailed travel expenses was refused by the Commons. The Commons is now spending thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money appealing the ruling to the Information Tribunal!

PLANS for a new supreme court for the UK, to replace the appeal functions of the House of Lords and Privy Council, have hit a hitch.

The law lords are supposed to take up their new posts as supreme court justices in the stunning "art nouveau gothic" surroundings of Middlesex Guildhall, on the south-west corner of Parliament Square.

In a statement last month, Lord Chancellor Lord Falconer said the supreme court implementation programme is "on target" to be operating in Middlesex Guildhall at the start of the legal year in 2009. But in order to set up the supreme court at Middlesex Guildhall, Middlesex crown court must first be booted out, to allow for £30m of alterations (described by Piloti in *Eye* 1165 as "wasteful and destructive").

The plan is to move the crown court 12 miles to a new six-courtroom extension at Isleworth crown court. There's just one problem – the London borough of Hounslow has refused planning permission for the extension to the court house, which is in a conservation area. An appeal against the decision is due to be heard on 15 November.

HERE's a ringing endorsement for the principals of Britain's further education colleges from the head of their national body: he doesn't think any of them are good enough to join the House of Lords.

A leaked email shows that in response to an internal suggestion that it would be a good idea to have more FE people on the red benches, John Brennan, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, wrote that "it would be great" if they could get some people from the further education field into the House of Lords… but that they couldn't find anyone good enough to nominate!

"There are very few individuals who command sufficient authority within the sector," he wrote, "let alone with an obvious ability to make a contribution outside the FE field – to stand much chance of success." Ouch.

AS WORTHY MPs and lords line up for the ePolitix Charity Champion Awards 2006, once again those dishing out the awards are no great friends to the voluntary and campaigning sector.

Private health giant BUPA remains in place as sponsor of the Older People's Champion (*Eye* 1121) despite its record of opposing greater regulation of care homes for the elderly (*Eyes passim*).

It is joined this year by Environment Champion sponsor United Utilities, which was fined £35,000 in July after pleading guilty to causing sewage effluent to enter a tributary of the River Dane. Also, in January the firm lost a high court fight to avoid having to comply with tighter regulations over how it handles sewage sludge. True champions of the environment then.

TERRY TOWLIN washable nappies & muslims x 13 from newborn upwards, good condition, nappy grant available to claim, £12. with baby toys —

Kent & Sussex Courier

HUTTON DRESSED AS SHAM

"THERE was no reasonable basis on which my conclusion that the government did not know that the 45 minutes claim was wrong and had not ordered the dossier to be sexed up could be described as a whitewash of the government," announced Lord Hutton last week his 26-page huff, *The Media Reaction to the Hutton Report*, published in academic journal *Public Law*.

This ignores the fact that everyone in the country except Tony Blair, Alistair Campbell and John Scarlett has long since concluded that that was what exactly it was. But then the good Lord is extremely good at ignoring things…

> *My terms of reference were 'urgently to conduct an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death of Dr Kelly… An inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of one man was not an appropriate forum for investigating the reliability of the intelligence provided to the government by the JIC [Joint Intelligence Committee] or the Prime Minister's use of the machinery of government.*

Hutton devotes 73 words of his 26-page article to the topic of "How Dr Kelly came to die", before getting on to such juicy topics as, er, the reliability of the intelligence provided to the government by the JIC and the prime minister's use of the machinery of government.

> *The evidence at the inquiry established that the allegations reported in the Today programme that the government probably knew that the 45 minutes claim was wrong… were unfounded.*

It certainly did. It was one of the first things to be established, on day 3, when Andrew Gilligan admitted in his evidence that "that was not an allegation I would necessarily support… My phraseology in that first two-way was not perfect… it was not my intention to give anyone the impression that the Government had lied or that it had made up this intelligence. It was real intelligence. I always wanted to make that clear."

> *In relation to the allegation that the dossier had been sexed up, it was important to bear in mind that this allegation was made in the Today broadcast immediately after the allegation that the 45 minutes figure was wrong. Accordingly, the allegation of sexing up would have been understood to mean that in response to the government's order to sex up the dossier, to make it more exciting and discover more facts, intelligence was included which the government probably knew was wrong.*

Would it? Surely it would have been understood to mean that they, er, sexed it up? In his 2004 report Hutton seemed to think the term was ambiguous – "It is capable of two different meanings. It could mean that the dossier was embellished with items of intelligence known or believed to be false… or it could mean that whilst the intelligence contained in the dossier was believed to be reliable, the dossier was drafted in such a way as to make the case against Saddam Hussein as strong as the intelligence contained in it permitted." He even admitted that: "If the term is used in this latter sense, then because of the drafting suggestions made by 10 Downing Street for the purpose of making a strong case against Saddam Hussein, it could be said that the Government 'sexed-up' the dossier." That's certainly what Dr Kelly appeared to be suggesting to journalist Susan Watts, in a transcript presented to the inquiry – "the word-smithing is actually quite important and the intelligence community are a pretty cautious lot on the whole but once you get people putting it/presenting it for public consumption then of course they use different words. I don't think they're being wilfully dishonest, I think they just think that that's the way the public will appreciate it best" – and it's what Hutton admitted had been implied by "the nuclear, chemical and biological weapons section of the Defence Intelligence Staff" whose head "did suggest that the wording relating to the 45 minutes claim was too strong". But all such ambiguity now appears to have been forgotten. If you've accused the government of lying once (even inadvertently), it stands to reason that you're always accusing it of lying – even when you're accusing it of doing something else.

> *Some of the commentators who criticised my conclusion that the government did not have a dishonourable strategy in relation to the naming of Dr Kelly suggested that I was too ready to accept the evidence of the Prime Minister and senior officials on this matter… A judge conducting a public enquiry must always be alert to the possibility that witnesses may not give truthful evidence in relation to particular matters… The evidence of the Prime Minister and the senior officials was strong and was consistent with the surrounding circumstances.*

Oh yeah? Hutton quotes great chunks of Tony Blair's evidence in which he claimed he was only keen to disclose Dr Kelly's admission that he had spoken to Gilligan so that "no-one could say afterwards: look, this is something that you people were trying to cover up or conceal from a House of Commons Committee… It did look as if we were withholding information of great public interest." This comes from a prime minister who for six years refused to allow Lord Birt or any of his other "special advisers" to be questioned by Commons committees, and for two years refused to show the Attorney General's advice on the war's legality to the cabinet, let alone parliament. Blair's unwillingness to share information with anyone beyond an intimate group of informal advisers was even criticised by Lord Butler in his inquiry – but Hutton appears to have been happy to take his word on this one (despite the fact that the prime minister's evidence contradicted a number of statements he made following Dr Kelly's death, as documented in Eye 1190).

> *Some commentators focused on Mr Campbell's diary entry that 'GH [Geoff Hoon] and I agreed it would f*** Gilligan if that [Dr Kelly] was his source… But this focusing on Mr Campbell's diary entry ignored the weight of the evidence given by the Prime Minister and some very senior officials.*

Instead, Hutton chose to ignore the existence of Alistair Campbell – which might at least help explain his conclusion that "there was no dishonourable, or underhand, or duplicitous strategy by the government".

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

A NEW EU-US deal, made over the heads of national parliaments and ignored by the media, is set to make it even easier for the US to whisk away "terrorists" on the basis of flimsy or even non-existent evidence.

The agreement builds on the controversial EU-US extradition agreement, which, when implemented in the UK by the then Home Secretary David Blunkett, removed the requirement on the US to provide prima facie evidence in extradition proceedings and led to the case of the "NatWest Three".

Under the new deal, a US official will participate in Eurojust, a little-known EU body that brings attorney-generals together to speed up cross-border crime investigations. The US liaison officer will have the power to access case files and send the information back home, where there are no data protection controls for material relating to non-US citizens.

Eurojust has justified the step as an anti-terrorism measure, but according to the vague wording of the agreement, the US may use the evidence it obtains in "non-criminal judicial and administrative proceedings" or "for any other purpose". Furthermore – *quelle surprise* – there is no reciprocal right for EU prosecutors to obtain information from the US! The path has therefore been smoothed for even more NatWest Three-style extraditions from across the EU.

EU-phemisms

Such as the Mafia, the IRA and Corsican gangsters

EU officials have set up their own court to try their own EU personnel, called the Tribunal de la Fonction Publique. Next month it will try the former chief accounting officer of the European Commission, Marta Andreasen, who is suing the commission for wrongful dismissal after she exposed irregularities in the EU accounting system and the Eurostat scandal.

Funnily enough it was the same anti-fraud commissioner who ignored Andreasen, Estonian Siim Kallas, who has just rejected the latest findings of the Court of Auditors showing £46bn of the EU's £70bn budget unaccounted for and claimed there was "simply a marginal percentage of errors" (*FT*).

When Andreasen was once questioned about Kallas' own involvement in an oil scam in his country (he was eventually acquitted), she said during a talk in 2005 that: "Coming from known corrupt bureaucracies, he is very knowledgeable about fraud."

LAST POST

STAFF and public who are fighting to stop the closure of Crown Offices across the country would have been surprised to hear Royal Mail chairman Allan Leighton waxing lyrical to his managers on the same subject.

In an address to a Post Office branch manager forum, Leighton described Crown Offices as "the jewel in the crown" pledging to "never walk away from an organisation with 400 Crown Offices in the best sites".

The Royal Mail chairman admitted: "It has been doing in my head that we can have 500 shops, probably in the best locations in Britain and lose a boat load of money."

Surprising this given that, as reported in *Eye* 1168, Leighton's senior management team has recent been busily shutting down six Crown Offices with the franchise for the services moving over to WH Smith.

In the land of Leighton-doublespeak, however, it will come as no surprise to hear ASDA's former finest tell his branch managers that WH Smith was "not a particularly good retailer" and that the managers should take pride in the Crown Post Offices as the flagship of the business.

A Royal Mail spokesman presented a slightly different picture: "Allan Leighton is a particular fan of WH Smith's Chief Executive, Kate Swann, who is driving sales back up at the company and his views are absolutely in line with the challenges facing the Post Office's loss-making, directly managed branches in the high street to ensure they maximise their retailing strengths to meet customer needs. The Post Office is delighted to be working in a retail partnership with WH Smith and we have been hugely impressed at the expertise they are bringing to our customer-focused relationship."

TV

Gold-Plated (C4)

ALTHOUGH you wouldn't get execs admitting it at the Edinburgh International Television Festival, the most influential TV drama of recent times has been *Footballers' Wives*. Maureen Chadwick and Anne McManus (who also created *Bad Girls*) pioneered a style of glossy melodrama, in which lurid plot-twists and serious issues alternated and the writers had their tongues in their cheeks, while the characters got theirs in all sorts of other places.

The style was so successful that everybody wanted some, even the supposed public service boys. The BBC commissioned McManus and Chadwick to create a show for them, although, to keep up appearances, this variation on the formula was set in the education system: *Waterloo Road*. Now Channel 4 has commissioned a drama which isn't written by the pair but which is so obviously indebted to *Footballers' Wives* they almost deserve a credit.

Gold-Plated is set among the *nouveaux* in Cheshire: somewhere like Alderley Edge, where the Manchester United players live and the local offie does Britain's highest annual sales of champagne.

At least none of the characters in Jimmy Gardner's opening script was actually a footballer or their partner, presumably because that would be too obvious, although the project does not spend too much time worrying about obviousness and the women in *Gold-Plated* were going to the kind of bars where you feel that Chardonnay and Tanya and the rest might just be out of shot.

The central character here, though, is John (David Schofield), a big Cheshire builder preparing for the christening party of his latest child, the first he's sired with his thin, dim, young, blonde mistress Cassidy, for whom he's recently left the missus. The establishing shots in the opening episode mainly featured Porsche badges, champagne glasses and gold jewellery

Viewers knew from the start that the builder is running out of money, his account frozen by the bank. But other plot details were lumpenly withheld during the opening exchanges in the hope of establishing tension. Cassidy, asked why her parents haven't come to the party, replied that they live in South Africa; but either she's a really bad actress or it was a lie.

Actually, in something like *Gold-Plated*: she's a really bad actress and it's a lie. It's true that starter episodes of drama have to lay down future plot-lines but this opener became so desperate to get viewers back for more that the central character at one point simply drove his car to a mental hospital where he sat for a while with a woman staring blankly ahead. Was she a wife? A daughter? The script editor?

Returning in week three to see if these would-be attention-holders had delivered, you discovered that the taster, depressing as it was, had served up the best first. The main character in the third episode was, wouldn't you know, a Premiership footballer, who starts putting it about among the wives and girlfriends and, inevitably, is papped leaving a nightclub. Held back until they hoped the critics would have stopped watching, this development confirmed the copycat opportunism of the entire enterprise.

Apart from the lack of originality, there are two big problems with this kind of thing, both of which involve the risk of doing what you're trying to accuse your characters of doing. Obstacle number one is that having the characters speaking shallow dialogue might be theoretically satirical but, unless the satire is very sharp, you simply get a script that feels shallow. A close up of fancy shoes followed by the line "Are those the metallic Gucci? Where do you source?" is supposed to be satirical but is contradicted by the show's own sensibilities.

The other contradiction is an even more deliberate hypocrisy. The builder has a dad who's a dirty old man, always ogling the tits and bums of the women at his son's parties. But this characteristic is illustrated by frequently showing the women from the point of view of Grandpa, the camera angles creeping around their thighs and breasts.

And the supposedly satirical salaciousness doesn't end there. Driving through a town, John's first wife gives a speech to her passenger about how every single woman in the place is sexier, younger and more attractive than she is. Again, the camera zooms in on their boobs and hemlines to make the point. But, because a camera-angle can't distinguish between a leer and a woman's regretful reflection, this sequence feels even more hypocritical than the ones involving Grandpa. By the third part they weren't even bothering to source the saucy angles to an ogling POV, but simply pivoting every shot on tits or legs.

It's in this respect that *Gold-Plated* most obviously fails in its open ambition to be a new *Footballers' Wives*. Its plot-twists are less silly than in that series, but *FW* had an openly feminist agenda, taking the side of its female characters against revolting and rapacious men. *Gold-Plated* aims for something of that in its treatment of the abandoned first wife but the overall feel is rather old-fashioned and masculine, reminiscent of family business dramas of the 70s and 80s such as *The Brothers* and *Howard's Way*. *Gold-Plated*, in fact, turns out looking rather tinny.

'Remote Controller'

AD NAUSEAM

EARLIER this year Ad Nauseam told of the startling similarities between Virgin Money's new campaign and a book called *Yes Man* by Danny Wallace (*Eye* 1157).

Subsequently, Virgin Money has done the decent thing and not changed its advertising one bit. Instead, its "Say Yes" campaign has now been taken online – and that's what brought about last week's rather gratifying coda.

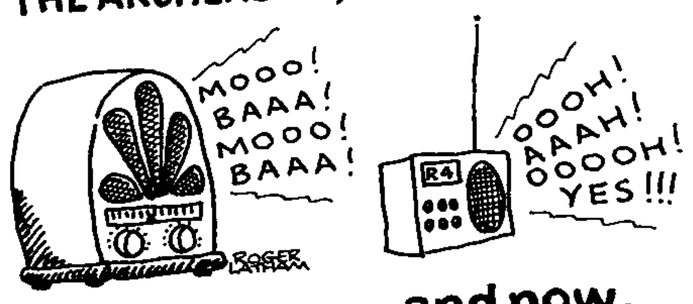
b3ta.com is a website on which bored graphic designers and internet anarchists entertain each other with cartoons and animations. One of the site's staples is a weekly image challenge in which readers are asked to come up with illustrations for categories such as "Old Age Superheroes" or "Kid Toys for Grown-Ups". Submissions vary from the smutty to the inspired.

Last week, Virgin Money decided to "sponsor" the b3ta image challenge, asking readers to submit suggestions for a new ad campaign, on the theme "What would happen if you said 'yes' to everything?" In return for providing Virgin with a wellspring of advertising ideas, readers were offered the chance to win an Xbox, which, at about 200 quid, is considerably less than it would cost to pay their agency RKCR to come up with new executions.

What Virgin hadn't counted on was the inventiveness and bile of the b3ta-ers, whose submissions arrived in massive numbers. One of them was an ad for TSB, the bank that likes to say yes, asking for their slogan back. Most of the others lambasted Virgin's cheap ploy or, more simply, opted for doctored photos of beardie Branson in strange sexual positions.

After two days of unrelenting mockery, Virgin ended the competition.

THE ARCHERS 15,000th EPISODE



Then... and now.

IRONY CORNER

"We all have a duty of care to ensure that from cradle to grave products are being used appropriately and do not do lasting harm."

– Deborah Allen, director of corporate responsibility at BAE Systems, telling the BBC about its development of green, "environmentally friendly" weapons such as reduced-lead bullets and recyclable explosives.

DUMB BRITAIN

Brain of Britain, Radio 4

Robert Robinson: The author of the influential 1963 book The Feminine Mystique and co-founder of the National Organization of Women in the USA died this year at the age of 85. What was her name?
Contestant: Bette Midler.

Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: Name the man who was president of Italy until May 2006.
Contestant: Don Corleone.

Mastermind, BBC2

John Humphrys: Which college has the motto "never tickle a sleeping dragon"?
Contestant: Eton?
Humphrys *(smiling)*: No, Hogwarts.

MEDIA NEWS

ONE hundred and fifty MPs have joined the growing band of sceptics who suspect that the BBC is about to abandon plans to move large sections of production to Manchester.

They have signed an early-day motion demanding that the Beeb "honour its commitment to the 14.4m licence-fee payers living in the north by confirming participation in the Media City", at a cost of £400m to licence-payers. There was no time to issue sympathies for any licence-fee payers living in the south.

They are right to feel nervous. Director-general Mark Thompson has already threatened to pull the project unless the BBC gets an above inflation increase to the licence fee to help fund it. BBC chairman Michael Grade's attempt to reassure MPs by saying that BBC governors remained committed "in principle" to the project certainly leaves room for manoeuvre.

Behind the scenes governors have voiced serious concern about where the £400m might actually end up. Tradition holds that the licence-fee should be invested in programme-making. But there is increasing concern that much of this dosh will simply benefit developers, the north-west regional development agency, estate agents and, of course, yet more independent production companies rather more than the dwindling audiences for BBC programmes.

The move was former director-general Greg Dyke's idea. All the more reason that Thompson, in a new "Value For Money" age, might be able to drop it without too much egg on face.

COMPLAINTS about the BBC's new "outsourced" jobs website are already flooding in. Candidates can now only apply for a single job at a time and are restricted to a 4,000 character entry in the "why I want the job" box, even for the most senior positions. Some job descriptions are inaccessible and there are issues with the reliability of passwords.

What lies behind the disaster? Over to Neil Coxon, "head of personal development and resourcing". "The new BBC job site was launched to introduce a new technology platform for Capita to work with the BBC to transform the service and continue to improve the online user experience for customers and hiring managers," he says.

Thanks to the licence-payer, Crapita triumphs again…

TONIGHT With Trevor McDonald **turned its attention to "mortgage misery" two weeks ago, as ITN hack Katie Bailey played the part of a first-time buyer trawling around mortgage-lenders in a big to expose their dodgy practices.**

Oddly enough Katie's father Brian is himself a mortgage-broker, working for the Openwork franchise (previously Zurich/Allied Dunbar). But he can't have been too offended by the programnme's aspersions on his noble trade: last week he fixed up a mortgage for Katie with Northern Rock.

BRIEFING BRIEF

AFTER an apparently top-level briefing, Sunday newspaper hacks on an MoD trip to Afghanistan dutifully reported that British troops at two key bases in Helmand province were "locked down". They all quoted a senior officer saying that patrols had been stopped from leaving Lashkar Gah and Gereshk after a Royal Marine had been killed in a suicide bombing.

However, no sooner had the reports appeared than they were rubbished by the spokesman for the British task force in Helmand, Lieutenant-Colonel Andy Price. He said they were "thoroughly misleading and incorrect" and "based on an initial brief before the journalists involved had reached Lashkar Gah".

So who was the idiot who had briefed the hacks that "We are not going out, the Afghan police and army are not going out"? Er, none other than Lt-Col Andy Price!

WORLD OF SPORT

PERHAPS mindful of the saying that busy men are the best to employ, Lord Coe of Olympia appears to be lined up for yet another top job in sport.

Already chairman of the organising committee for the London Olympics in 2012, Coe has been tapped up as a potential new chairman of the Football Association, a suitably high profile post for the ever-ambitious former Tory MP and judo partner of William Hague.

This news will not necessarily go down well in football circles, where Chelsea-supporting Coe would be regarded as an untrusted outsider. It certainly has not been well received among athletics chiefs.

For the past 18 months, they have been working to create the role of chairman at UK Athletics for his lordship. Now, with UKA chief executive Dave Moorcroft having quit, the way is open for Coe to step in. Except he has decided he no longer wants that job. His lordship is clearly far too busy with his football interests, such as heading up Sepp Blatter's whitewash operation on the ethics committee for Fifa, the bribe-ridden world football body.

"TODAY, there should be a fascinating conference in London, organised jointly by the Sport Industry Group and the *Financial Times*, at which the future direction of the funding of sport is one of the main topics on the agenda," wrote sports columnist and BBC presenter John Inverdale in the *Telegraph* last week.

"The list of delegates and speakers is a veritable collection of *galacticos* from the worlds of corporate finance, governing bodies and the media."

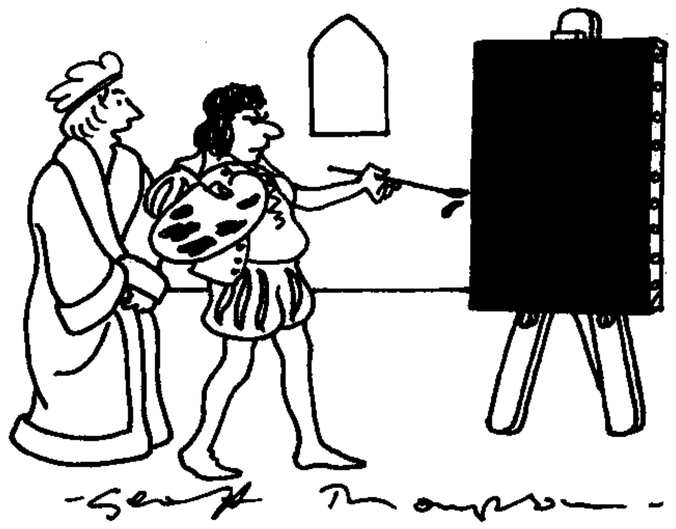
And which *galactico* from the world of the media was being paid to chair this grand summit? Step forward one J. Inverdale.

IN THE COURTS

LORD Ballyedmond's legal campaign against the Cumbrian villagers who lodged objections to his car park plans with their local council (*Eyes passim*) was "an unacceptable attempt to stifle a legitimate public controversy", the court of appeal ruled.

His lordship tried unsuccessfully to sue parish councillor Nigel Holmes and another local man, Malcom Ward, for libel earlier this year. Despite criticism from the judges when the high court halted the action, Ballyedmond pursued the case all the way to the court of appeal last month, putting the villagers who dared to oppose his will through yet more months of stress.

Lord Justice Sedley said that if the objection sent to the council planning department could be considered libellous "every controversial planning application will be followed by a writ". He said the objection to the plans was a "fierce but perfectly legitimate comment on the proposal, made to people with a legitimate interest in knowing what the writer thinks".



"I think you've taken Chiaroscuro to its limits, Caravaggio!

TOURISM UPDATE

AT LAST – a clue as to why the Lake District National Park Authority has been paying its boss Paul Tiplady his £70,000 a year salary to stay at home on "sabbatical".

In response to a Freedom of Information request from *Private Eye*, the LDNPA replied: "Mr Tiplady agreed to take leave of absence from the Authority to allow an independent investigation to be carried out in relation to the management of the Authority."

The *Westmorland Gazette*, whose earlier FOI requests were completely stonewalled (see *Eye* 1168), also got a reply, after complaining to the Information Commissioner, to the question of when Mr Tiplady might return to work.

"The investigation will be concluded shortly and upon receipt of the independent person's report the Authority will consider what, if any, further action should be taken," it said. "The Authority is unable to comment further at this stage."

The LDNPA received a damning audit report in January, saying management had put the authority's finances in "a precarious position". Budget cutting moves have also seen the closure of several information centres around the Lakes.

CHARITY NEWS

POOR old Tesco. Profits of £1.15bn and still its Banbury store can't apparently afford to buy its own Christmas tree.

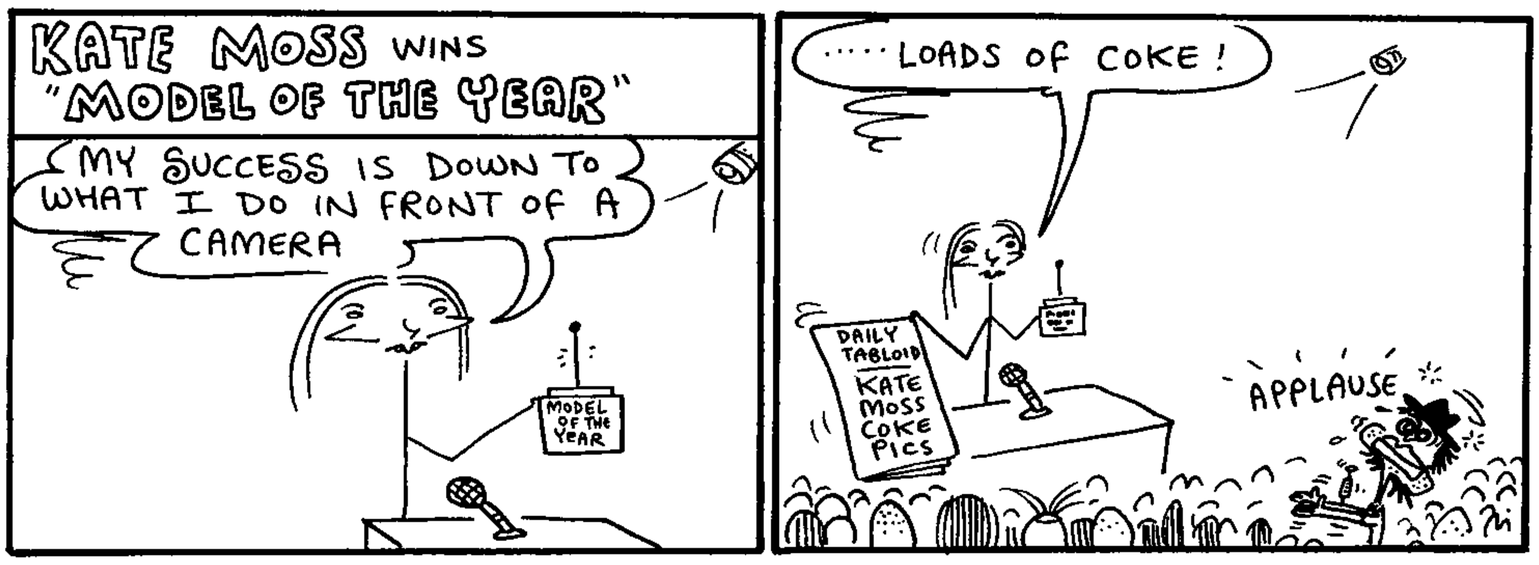
Staff at a plant nursery in Oxfordshire were astonished to receive a plea from their local Tesco for a Christmas tree to be donated. The store's letter explains that it will be generously, er, allowing schools and charities to provide entertainment outside the store to raise funds.

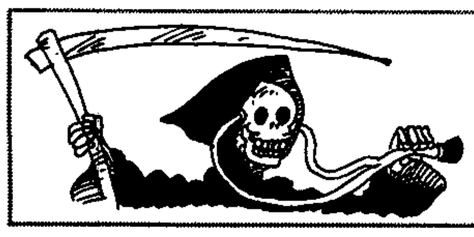
"It would be really lovely for staff, customers and fundraisers if we had a real Christmas tree as a backdrop," begs Tesco. "We are looking for a large tree in the region of 10+ foot tall (obviously the bigger the better) and hopefully some out door tree lights and we wonderer [sic] if you would help us by donating either or both of these items."

"It was intended more as a business opportunity than a begging letter," explained a Tesco spokeswoman, who said last year a Christmas tree supplier had provided a tree in return for being allowed to advertise where the trees were available. So that's all right then.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


KATE MOSS WINS "MODEL OF THE YEAR"
MY SUCCESS IS DOWN TO WHAT I DO IN FRONT OF A CAMERA
MODEL OF THE YEAR
..... LOADS OF COKE!
DAILY TABLOID
KATE MOSS COKE PICS
APPLAUSE



HEALTH SPECIAL

MEDICINE BALLS

Reconfiguration

WHY has New Labour failed to win the hearts and minds of doctors for its reform programme? For a while it won their silence, by stuffing their mouths with gold and cutting waiting times for surgery. But last week, in the fag end of Blair's administration, hundreds of members of the most politically apathetic profession donned catchy "Working for a better NHS" scarves and marched on parliament, mumbling "NHS SOS".

There is a groundswell of opinion among doctors that the government has badly screwed up its "£100bn a year" chance to save the NHS, at least in England. Its biggest error has been to become so preoccupied with attracting private business that it has neglected to reconfigure the NHS until hospitals are deeply in debt. So even rational decisions about which hospitals and services need to close or merge are clouded in protests about finance and privatisation. Add in the political sensibilities of closures in marginal constituencies, and the most important reform is doomed to failure.

Since exposing the Bristol cardiac disaster in 1992, M.D. has argued that specialist, hi-tech services have to be centralised in fewer centres where resources are concentrated and there is a sufficient caseload for safe training and meaningful audit. The *Eye* exposed a succession of scandals where surgeons were doing highly complex operations occasionally, and often badly, and successfully campaigned for children's liver surgery and cleft palate repair to be restricted to fewer, accredited centres.

As technology has advanced over the last 15 years, and the European working time directive kicked in, the centralisation argument has applied to more specialties. There are too many district general hospitals in the NHS and too many small casualty departments and maternity units. This was evident when Labour took office and if the government had used the goodwill of the initial cash injection to get NHS staff and patients to agree on how local services needed to change, it might have succeeded.

Instead it threw the money at ill-conceived PFI deals, private surgical contractors, pointless quangos, the destruction of GP fundholding, the creation of 300 primary care trusts, the subsequent destruction of half of the primary care trusts and the reintroduction of GP fundholding. The attempt to introduce market competition and get money to follow the patient kicked off with a disastrous tariff system that lead to record debts and the resignation of the chief executive, Nigel Crisp. The 2007-2008 tariff has just been announced, and trusts will have to spend an enormous amount of time trying to "unbundled it" (ie fight with each other to make sure they get paid for all their bits of treatment).

As in America, a hospital's survival will become entirely dependent on the success of its coding and debt collection departments, which are a hugely expensive, administrative cash drain. Contrast this to the tariff-free NHS in Scotland, which is well down the road of reconfiguration thanks to a clear national plan, extensive parliamentary debate, cross party support and the involvement of staff and patients. Markets and fragmentation don't work in healthcare, consultation and cooperation do. Alas, it's too late for the English NHS.

M.D.

Cuts: Local zeroes

HEALTH Secretary Patricia Hewitt's response to the latest protests has been unapologetic. "The NHS is now working to improve healthcare further, with more care closer to home, delivered more productively," she said last week.

Really? If services really are going to be based locally and in the community, one might expect to see more staff on the front line. But in the drive to balance books and reduce budget deficits, the NHS axe is actually falling just as hard on health visitors, midwives, therapists and community nurses.

Hewitt maintains that there have only been 900 recent redundancies across the NHS; but even if she is right (and this is disputed) she still ignores the thousands of posts that have gone through non-replacement.

Meanwhile **West Kent Primary Care Trust** plans to axe 15 of its 62 health visitor posts; there was anger in **Cornwall** when it was revealed that a school nurse had 9,000 children on her books – with up to 25 on the child protection register; 81 community posts in **Hackney** have been axed; and a third have gone in **north Hampshire**.

Mental health services are also suffering badly with, for example, 40 out of 160 community nurse jobs and six out of 40 occupational posts being axed in **Manchester** alone.

Elsewhere a shortage of midwives means some women are having to go to hospital because there is no staff for home births; or being turned out of hospital after only a few hours. The *Eye* recently reported how 42 newly-trained health visitors and district nurses had to look for other work after completing their courses, because cash-strapped health trusts were cutting back services.

And of course the knock-on effect goes further with universities now being forced to cut courses for midwifes, nurses and health visitors as strategic health authorities cut their training budgets.

Does Mrs Hewitt accept this? Or is the truth just too "close to home"?

PFI: Alice in blunderland

THE revelation that PFI hospital contracts signed under New Labour will cost the NHS £52bn is shocking enough, but how has the public been hoodwinked into a scheme whose costs will exceed £100bn when deals in the pipeline come through?

These costs assume that payments on a PFI scheme will increase by inflation at 2.5 percent, typically for 30 years. Nothing controversial about that. But when the cost of a PFI is compared with the alternative of public funding to see if will be value for money, the annual PFI payments are *discounted* by 3.5 percent per year.

Thus the cost of a PFI contract magically shrinks to much less than it would cost even at current prices and always *looks* cheaper than the alternative of public funding and ownership.

Darent Valley PFI hospital, for example, will cost £635m (or around £530m before inflation) but was discounted to £171m when judging its value for money – conveniently just below the public sector alternative. The total cost of **West Middlesex hospital** PFI will be £538m, or £350m without inflation, but was dropped to £130m under the formula, again neatly below the £140m cost of publicly funding it.

The justification for this *Alice in Wonderland* approach to public investment is a theory from the Treasury that says it's better to buy new facilities as soon as possible. Many would agree; but hospital building could be brought forward just as easily (and much more cheaply) by public borrowing at lower interest rates. That would put the debts on the government's balance sheet, however, which is something the Treasury is desperate to avoid – hence the preference for PFI. Figures released by the Office of National Statistics show that not a penny of the 12-figure commitment for PFI hospitals appears in government debt figures.

Meanwhile the Treasury chief accountant who approved the theory that generates an unbeatable bias in favour of PFI, Sir John Likierman, now sits on the board of Barclays bank – which just happens to make millions from financing PFI.

Up and over-running

OF THE 50 PFI hospitals already open official figures show that 27 are already running well over the originally estimated costs, by a total of £21m per year, variously explained by "contract variations", "additional services" and "increased maintenance costs".

Unsurprisingly significant cost over-runs occur in trusts struggling with large deficits, notably at **Worcestershire Royal Infirmary** (payment up £2.9m a year since opening), **Queen Elizabeth Greenwich** (up £1.5m) and **Norfolk & Norwich** (up £1.4m). And these are just the early PFI schemes. According to government figures for approved deals, fewer than 15 percent are up and running – the rest are either being negotiated or built.

Even the Tories, inventors of PFI, are demanding a re-examination of the economics while yet another report, this time for the King's Fund think tank, has pointed out how it harms trusts. Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt's response has been merely to trim slightly some of the schemes she approves, for example the recently signed **Barts and Royal London** deal. The hospital and services such as cleaning and portering will still cost £5.1bn over 35 years. That's more than £5m per bed or more than £400 each per night even if the hospital were full every day for the next 35 years – more than private hospitals charge. And that's before paying for any medical care!

IT: BT beaten

THINGS go from bad to worse for BT, the largest contractor on the NHS's National Programme for IT (NPfIT).

The latest figures from the Department of Health agency running the programme, Connecting for Health, show that this year the firm has not installed a single hospital administration or record system – the most crucial element of its main NPfIT contract as "local service provider" for London. In total it has managed just one and, almost three years into the contract, is already a couple of years behind schedule.

BT lost its software supplier, IDX, back in January and is still negotiating a deal with American rival Cerner. This company also provides software for Fujitsu – the company responsible for the programme across the south of England. But it too has been stunningly unsuccessful: just three hospital systems installed, with many experts blaming the incompatibility of software written for a very different US health system.

With Accenture having pulled out of its contracts for the north and east of England and US contractor CSC faring little better in the north west, many feel the time has come for a root and branch review.

Leading the call are 23 prominent IT academics who demanded a technical review as long ago as April. As with other pear-shaped ventures, however, the government doesn't want to talk about it, Health Minister Lord Warner rejecting the calls at a *Health Service Journal* conference two weeks ago. Thrusting his head firmly in the sand, Warner could just be heard saying: "We are not going to be deflected by naysayers from any quarter. We recognise that more needs to be done on articulating the benefits that the programme will bring to patients and also to NHS staff." More spin, in other words.

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

VERA OFF-COURSE

HATS off to councillors on the Isle of Wight for appointing a four-strong independent remuneration panel to report on councillors' pay.

The panel of worthies, drawn from outside the council, recommended that councillors should this year accept no more than a 2 percent pay rise. After due consideration, the members awarded themselves 25 percent. Trebles all round! Except for the four members of the remuneration panel, who have resigned in disgust.

While islanders were puzzling how this squared with the Tories' election pledge to cut spending that swept them to power 18 months ago, it then emerged that the council has spent a whopping £5.2m on 140 consultants in that time. This included £200,000 on head-hunters to recruit the replacements for nine senior officials booted out with payoffs totalling nearly £1m (*Eye* 1169). The £10,000 a month that £150,000 pa chief executive Joe "Vera" Duckworth is spending on alleged PR wizards from his former council, Westminster, seems to be slow in bearing fruit.

● **GOOD to hear that Hillingdon council's Conservative leader Ray Puddifoot is fully behind Call Me Dave's new, more inclusive Tory message – although he seems to be having trouble with his apostrophes. Hillingdon successfully sought permission from Buckingham Palace to name a new sports centre the Queen's Athletics Centre, given that the project was launched in the 2002 jubilee year. But when cabinet secretary Mark Braddock proudly informed Puddifoot that permission had been granted, the leader wrote back: "Under no circumstances will this be permitted. Tell the Palace immediately that the name is unacceptable. This name will associate the centre with the gay community not the Queen and it is Her Majesty that we wish to honour. I'm sure they will see this." Shame. The "Hillingdon Athletic Stadium" doesn't quite have the same ring to it, does it?**

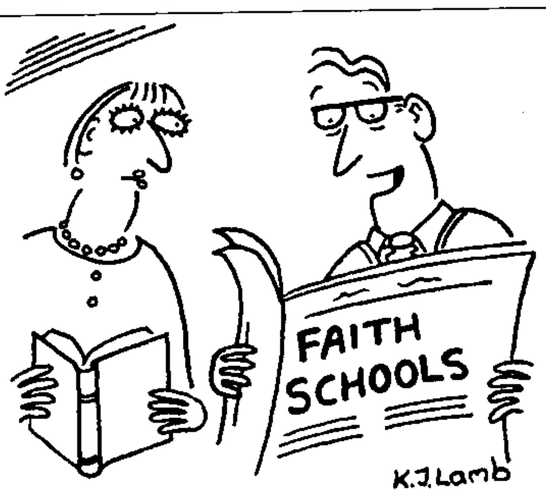
PIPE DOWN

DEMOCRACY continues to work in mysterious ways at Neath Port Talbot council over National Grid's plan to build a £750m gas pipeline across Wales (*Eye* 1170)

At the village of Cilfrew work has begun on a gas pressure reduction plant residents fear will be both a safety hazard and an eyesore. NG's planning application squeezed through by 13 votes to 12 after four ratepayer councillors on the planning committee were allegedly "leaned on" not to vote. Before the crucial meeting, council officers were seen in private conversations with the foursome, who then left the chamber. They had been expected to vote against the plant.

The council says it was simply reminding them of rules that prevent members "prejudging" an issue before a committee vote. "Whether they voted was a matter for them," a council spokeswoman said. Funny, then, that none did, and that they've been mysteriously silent ever since. But one ratepayer councillor now suggests he was leaned on, saying "when you're 'strongly advised' by the monitoring officer, you don't vote".

Environmental lawyer Richard Buxton is seeking judicial review on behalf of the villagers, claiming that the four were put undue pressure and that the vote was "unfair and invalid". He has also obtained a court order obliging the council to obtain statements from the four councillors about exactly what went on. They should make interesting reading.



"Here's one that's fully inclusive and unites everyone – it's a 'No faith in Blair' school!"

● **AFTER just six months on Barking and Dagenham council, the BNP's Sandra Doncaster is facing the collapse of her undistinguished political career. As *Eye* 1167 reported, Mrs Doncaster owes her own council £2,170.34 in unpaid council tax. B&D council has now applied to Romford county court to have her declared bankrupt. The 1972 Local Government Act stipulates that anyone who becomes bankrupt is automatically disqualified to sit as a councillor. In August, Sandra's daughter Claire – also a BNP councillor – was evicted from her B&D council flat for being £2,000 behind on her rent.**

ROBIN HOODIES

MORE evidence of apparently unlawful behaviour from east London borough of Newham mayor Sir Robin Wales's private police force, aka the Newham parks constabulary (*Eyes passim*).

At 9.30pm on 7 September parks "constables" chased, stopped and questioned a 15-year-old youth in Dundee Road, Plaistow, after he had allegedly been "abusive and rude" to them in nearby Plaistow Park. No action was taken other than that the youth was given "advice". The incident was recorded on an official Metropolitan police "stop and search" form, which the *Eye* has seen.

Parks constables, despite wearing uniforms which are virtually indistinguishable from those of real policemen, are not members of the Metropolitan police. They have no power to stop and search people on the street. Their powers of "arrest" are confined to parks – and even there are no greater than that of any ordinary person who might carry out a "citizen's arrest" if they witnessed a crime being committed. Yet in Newham, minimally trained parks "constables" strut the streets impersonating police officers.

● **PITY the shopkeepers of Bath. Under new regulations introduced by Bath & North East Somerset council (Banes), businesses placing rubbish out on the streets on the "wrong" day face fines of £50. Last Wednesday every office and shop in Gay St received a penalty ticket for leaving unauthorised bin bags on the pavement. In fact, it was the right day, but the binmen didn't turn up. Officials declined to accept the mistake was theirs and refused to cancel the fines. However, they said they might consider pleas for leniency on a "case-by-case" basis. How magnanimous.**

OPEN CITY

PETERBOROUGH city councillor David Sanders, son of Neville "Fuck the Irish" Sanders (*Eyes passim*), may yet be penalised for trying to wangle his dad a £6,000-a-year seat on Cambridgeshire police authority without declaring an interest.

The Standards Board for England received a complaint about the matter but referred it back to Pottyborough's own standards committee. Sanders's Tory chums first ignored the legal requirement to hold a hearing within three months and then decided that because it all happened more than a year previously, it would be "unfair" to take any action against the boy David (*Eye* 1166).

However, in the face of public disquiet council chief executive Gillian Beasley has commissioned an investigation into the delay which will be carried out by an "independent" investigator and will be "wide ranging and complex". In the spirit of openness that inspires Peterbore council, however, this was never announced to the media, only to councillors, who were told to keep quiet about it. Meanwhile the city's head of legal services, Michelle Groves, has departed after spending the last three months on gardening leave. Nice work!

● **YOU have to feel sorry for the Isles of Scilly council. First it was named and shamed by the Fire Brigades Union's black and ethnic minority executive council for its "abysmal" shortage of ethnic minority staff. Protests by the Islands' fire chief that the ethnic representation on the Scilly fire brigade "accurately reflects the ethnic composition of the wider community" – ie zero – are unlikely to appease the zealous FBU. Now the council has been awarded *nul points* by the audit commission for failing to implement government initiatives to reduce the number of deaths on the roads. Council chiefs are now urgently addressing the problem of how to cut the carnage in a place where no one, ever, since the invention of the motor car, has been killed in a road accident.**

CHARITY NEWS

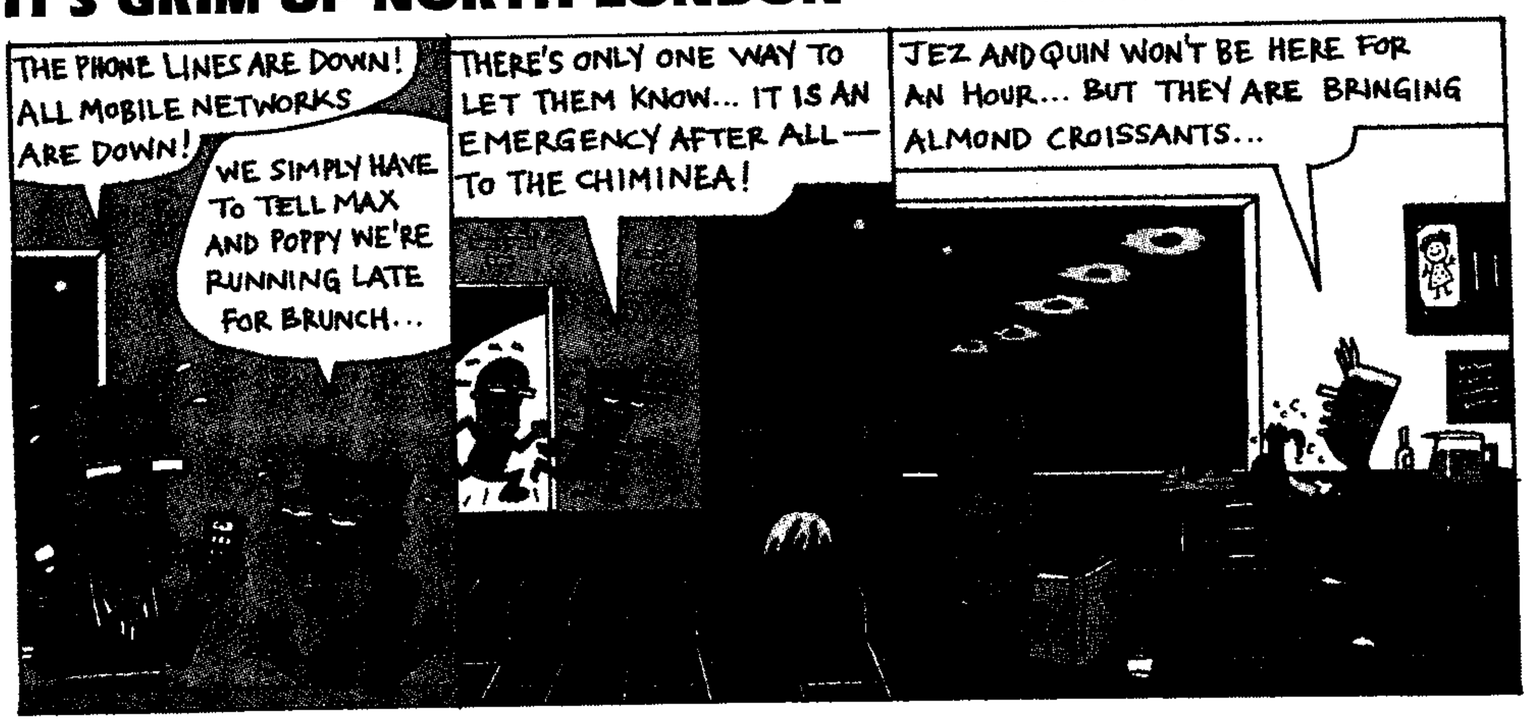
PLAYGROUNDS charity Kids was not pleased by its appearance in *Eye* 1169, highlighting its fundraising practices in the light of its plans to introduce charging at some of its playgrounds for disabled children.

"I am delighted to say that following a full investigation it was announced last week that kids had been fully cleared of any wrongdoing," insisted a letter from regional director Angela Woodley that accused the Eye of "inaccurate reporting".

Only, er, it hasn't been. According to the Charity Commission, it did not carry out a full formal investigation of the charity, but what it calls "an assessment case" to find out what evidence existed for the concerns that had been raised. And far from fully clearing the charity, this assessment found that "issues of concern about fundraising in 2005 had been raised and recognised by the trustees" and have now been addressed "resulting in an improved position".

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

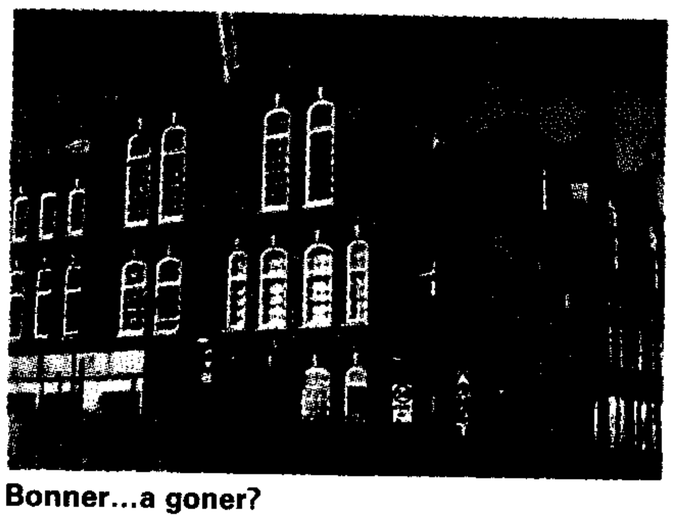

THE PHONE LINES ARE DOWN! ALL MOBILE NETWORKS ARE DOWN!
WE SIMPLY HAVE TO TELL MAX AND POPPY WE'RE RUNNING LATE FOR BRUNCH...
THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO LET THEM KNOW... IT IS AN EMERGENCY AFTER ALL— TO THE CHIMINEA!
JEZ AND QUIN WON'T BE HERE FOR AN HOUR... BUT THEY ARE BRINGING ALMOND CROISSANTS...

NOOKS and CORNERS

"LOOK at those big isolated clumps of buildings rising above the slates, like brick islands in a lead coloured sea," observed Sherlock Holmes to Dr Watson as they rattled along one of the railway viaducts near Clapham Junction. "The Board Schools." "Lighthouses, my boy! Beacons of the future! Capsules, with hundreds of bright little seeds in each, out of which will spring the wiser, better England of the future."

The language is almost Blairite – except that the surviving Board Schools, it seems, have no place in the bright New Labour future.

It is not often that George Galloway MP finds himself on the same platform as the Conservatives. He did a few weeks back in Bethnal Green when the leaders of the Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives and the Respect Party groups in the London borough of Tower Hamlets were all united in condemning the dubious commercially-motivated policies of the ruling Labour majority of councillors. The occasion was the laying of a wreath on the wall of the Bonner Street School, one of the many schools built in the East End following the passing of Forster's Education Act of 1870.



Bonner...a goner?

The Bonner Street building was built in 1875-76 to the designs of E.R. Robson, architect to the London School Board, and his partner J.J. Stevenson. With its Dutch gables and tall windows lighting airy classrooms, enhanced by a sculptured panel by Spencer Stanhope illustrating "knowledge strangling ignorance", this three-storey, properly urban building is a fine example of the progressive brick "Queen Anne" style which so well expressed the enlightened aims of the act. And now, having survived the bombing of the Second World War which destroyed so much of this longsuffering part of London, it is to be demolished to make way for a playground and car park.

Bonner Street was (surely wrongly) rejected for listing in a survey of Board Schools in 1994 on the grounds that it had been altered by enlargement, although English Heritage insisted that it is "a solid local landmark" and "a building of very strong local interest". It is a sound and handsome building which could perfectly well continue in educational use or, if not, could be converted into flats (as proposed in 2001 when planning permission was given for a new school building).

Instead it is being demolished to facilitate the nefarious Private Finance Initiative which is being used by Tower Hamlets to build new schools. A mediocre two-storey new block has already gone up, built by Balfour Beatty; and, for the next phase, it is found to be easier to build on the existing playground and demolish the old Board School block to create open space rather than to work with and modernise the Robson & Stevenson building. That, after all, would require sensitivity, intelligence and architectural skill – qualities not available under PFI.

So, despite the vigorous opposition of the Save Old Bonner School Campaign, which submitted a petition against demolition signed by 719 local residents, together with the Victorian Society, this excellent former "beacon of the future" is coming down. The speakers at the "funeral" ceremony emphasised its importance as a piece of local history. What also should be said is that it is a sound and useful building which could and ought to have a future.

The situation here contrasts pertinently with that at the Geoffrey Chaucer School off the Old Kent Road where the Twentieth Century Society is fighting a proposal by Southwark Council to demolish most of a remarkable but flawed complex of buildings of 1958 by Chamberlin, Powell & Bon (architects of the Barbican) to make way for one of Blair's new city academies, but where the adjacent Board School of 1873-75 (by Col. Edis) is being retained. Why? Because it *works* as a school building.

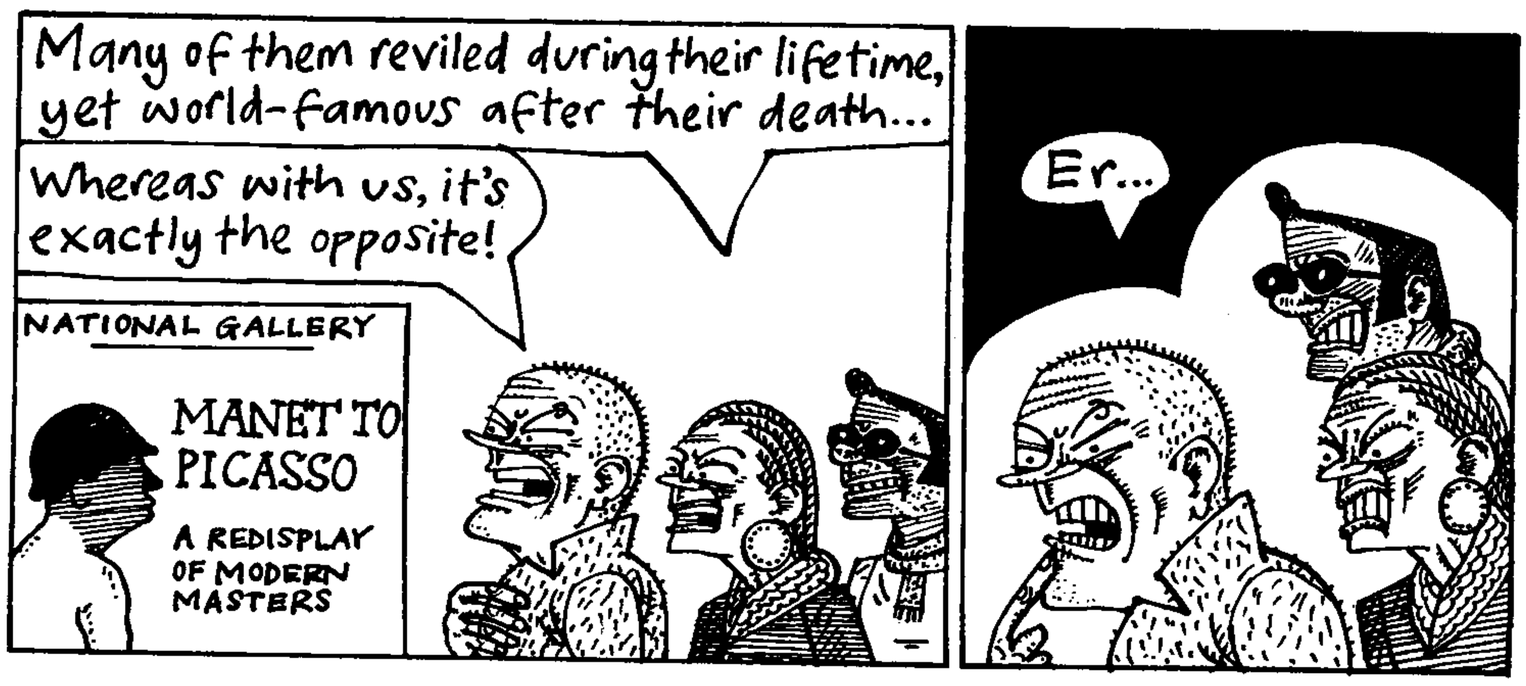
Bonner Street is not a unique case. All over Britain perfectly sound and handsome school buildings are threatened with replacement. This is because the Blair government's answer to all problems is to fling money at them and indulge in cheap, spurious rhetoric about newness and modernity. So £45bn has been allotted to rebuild or refurbish every secondary school in the country. And, as most of this work will be done under the favoured PFI, it is easier – and so much more profitable for the contractors and management companies – just to rebuild. Yet the evidence is mounting up about the inadequate and poorly performing buildings that result (and rumour has it in Tower Hamlets that the first new building at Bonner Street will soon have to be replaced.) A study commissioned by the Department for Education & Skills recently looked at twelve "exemplar" new schools and found that they used up to five times more energy than they were designed to. That means electricity, the generation of which contributes to climate change to whose alarming consequences our government has at last woken up. Solid masonry buildings, like old Bonner Street, are usually more efficient thermally as well as representing so much "embodied energy" that it is wicked and foolish to waste.

Meanwhile, the local campaigners are demanding that at least the single-storey infants' wing is retained as a "pavilion" in the playground. This would be better than nothing, so good luck to them.

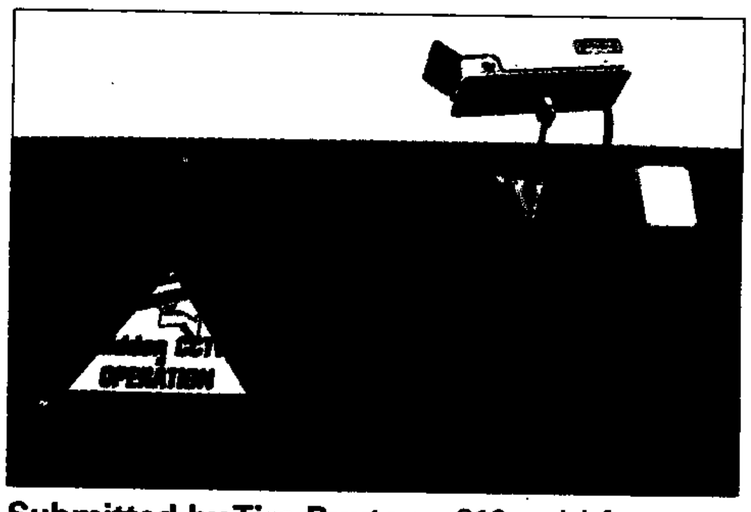
'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


Many of them reviled during their lifetime, yet world-famous after their death...
Whereas with us, it's exactly the opposite!
NATIONAL GALLERY
MANET TO PICASSO
A REDISPLAY OF MODERN MASTERS
Er...

I-SPY *Central London*



Submitted by Tim Buxton. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

PUBS AND PUBMEN

STOCK-EXCHANGE listed brewer Greene King certainly knows how to talk the talk when it comes to keeping alive the traditional British pub.

It sponsors the annual Perfect Pub award, currently being promoted in the *Daily Telegraph*, and earlier this year it hosted the launch of *The Publican* trade paper's Proud of Pubs campaign at the House of Commons, which was attended by scores of thirsty MPs.

Greene King's chief executive, Rooney Anand, told the honourable members it was a "great start" in the battle to keep pubs alive and at the centre of local communities. "It's about time society started standing up for pubs, and recognising them as one of our nation's greatest assets," he said. Greene King marketing director Fiona Hope said: "The pub and the pint are great institutions that play a positive role in millions of people's lives."

All of which has a somewhat hollow ring to thousands of customers of locals up and down Britain who have experienced the way Greene King stands up for local pubs and communities at first hand.

In recent years Greede King, which owns 2,600 pubs and made an operating profit of £191m last year, has bought — and closed —three local traditional breweries, Morlands, Ridleys and Hardys & Hansons. In September it paid £217m for Hardys & Hansons' Victorian Kimberley brewery in Nottingham, plus 250 pubs. In October it announced it was closing the brewery and transferring production to Bury St Edmunds by the end of the year, with the loss of 80 jobs. GK also announced last month that it was putting 150 pubs across Britain up for sale. Most are likely to be redeveloped as flats or turned into restaurants, because GK can make quicker short-term profits that way.

In Lewes, East Sussex, more than 1,000 people, including local MP Norman Baker, have signed a petition against GK's decision to stop selling Harveys, the award-winning ale that has been brewed by an independent family company in the town for more than 200 years, at the Lewes Arms, the town's foremost "community" pub.

The 207-year-old pub, a warren of small rooms and wonky stairs, is home to dozens of clubs and societies and all manner of eccentric charitable events, such as the World Pea-Throwing Championships. Its regulars are devoted to their local brew, which outsells all other beers, including Greene King's, by at least four to one. They fear that the ban on Harveys is but the first step in a process which could see their beloved local, like scores of others owned by Greede King, turned into flats or even a gastropub – and sod the locals.

Down on the Farm

A QUICK way to assess the performance of any organisation is to look at both ends of it: what goes on at the top, what goes on at the bottom.

When the MPs on the public accounts committee (PAC) decided to look into why the Rural Payments Agency had made such an unholy shambles of handing out EU subsidies to English farmers, they naturally wanted to interview Johnston McNeill, the formerly high-flying Northern Irish thug who until last March presided over this sea of chaos until he was suspended from his £114,000-a-year post as the agency's chief executive. When the day came, however, McNeill sent in a sick note. He couldn't appear before the committee because he was at home suffering from "stress".

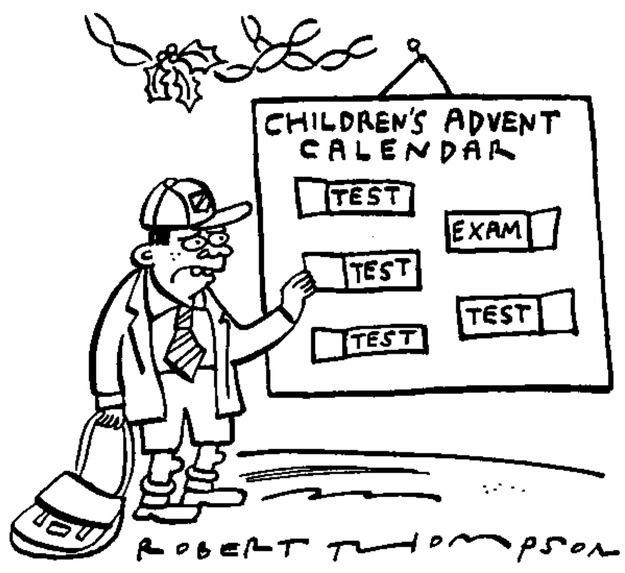
The committee's chairman, Edward Leigh, could scarcely restrain a disbelieving sneer as he explained why McNeill was unable to help the MPs with their inquiries. He recalled that he had recently attended a seminar on "rural stress", where it was suggested that one of the chief reasons for misery in the countryside these days is the strain inflicted on farmers by the chaos into which McNeill allowed his agency to sink. So great was the stress caused by the agency, Leigh observed, that the seminar heard it had even caused three farmers to commit suicide.

Stressful the agency's boss may be finding life these days in his semi-retirement, after a dizzying climb up the ladder of public service in which the taxpayers showered him with a succession of ever fatter pay cheques. But at least he can take consolation from the fact that he is not only still receiving his full salary but has just been handed a £60,000 bonus, for "meeting his 2005 targets". This was the year when he somehow found it virtually impossible to organise the sending out of farm payments: the very job for which was receiving his £2,200-a-week wages. In addition to this, lest the stress of sitting at home prove too much for the poor fellow, he can look forward to a £42,000 pay-off when he finally relinquishes his post, and after that a pension of £12,000 a year for life (in addition to all the other pension rights he has totted up in his years of loyal public service).

Switch attention now to how the agency over whose affairs he so skilfully presided performs at the bottom of the heap, in its day-to-day dealings with the farmers it likes to describe as its "customers". When Clive Coward, who owns two small farms in Surrey, recently wished to notify the agency that he was changing his office address to new premises just up the road, he wrote to tell them so. Back from one of McNeill's underlings in the agency's Newcastle "customer service centre" came a letter headed "Incorrect empowerment for request".

"Unfortunately", the letter explained, "your current empowerments do not authorise us to make this change". Mr Coward would have to fill in the requisite form, 18 pages long. To assist him they helpfully enclosed a 36-page booklet advising how the form should be filled in. All this just to notify the agency of a simple change of address. It is hardly surprising the agency finds it so difficult to pay farmers the money they are owed, or that some farmers might even be driven to suicide. But at least Mr McNeill gets his money on time, even if he no longer has to work for it.

'Muckspreader'



SIGNAL FAILURES

Terminal decline

GREATER use of rail freight is a popular policy for politicians to espouse, but officialdom has a mental block over the terminals needed to load or unload goods.

Private firms are willing to spend £2bn on new rail-freight terminals but receive no advice or support in the planning process, according to a group of companies lobbying on the subject. Encouraged by government promises to increase freight on trains, one company spent £10m developing plans for a rail-freight terminal adjacent to Heathrow's future terminal five. Labour then blocked the scheme.

Even existing terminals are threatened. The Crossrail Bill, for an east-west line under London, would give the new services priority on tracks west of Paddington that now provide access to terminals where aggregates come into the capital by train, avoiding lorry movements on some of England's most congested sections of motorway. The government wants Crossrail to be able to overrule the rail regulator, as this would encourage private investors to back Crossrail; it conveniently forgets the investors who have already backed rail freight on the understanding an independent regulator will always ensure fair play.

The Scottish Executive is paying £4m to enlarge the clearance gauge between Glasgow and Aberdeen for trains to carry larger maritime containers. Aberdeen City Council was delighted when the work was announced last year. But the same council is determined the city's rail-freight terminal will be relocated far away from the harbour, to make way for "a traditional mall and retail park" (more shops). Transferring containers from ship to train would then become costlier and more complicated; they might end up going all the way by lorry or not coming ashore at Aberdeen, largely negating the £4m gauge project.

The council awarded consent for the shops in 2000. Now the planning consent seems to have expired because work on the site didn't start within the allotted five years. Meanwhile rail freight handled at the terminal has grown. When pressed by the Aberdeen Harbour Board, which wants to invest in upgraded rail-freight facilities, Aberdeen council chief Douglas Paterson denied in January the consent had expired: "I have been advised by Dr Margaret Bochel, head of physical development [ie a council employee], that the outstanding planning conditions have now been purified, and in planning terms appropriate action has been undertaken by the developers to satisfy her that development has commenced."

How odd. Six months later – and nine months after the five-year planning deadline had passed – the council announced: "The first phase of the development is expected to begin later this year."

'Dr B Ching'

JUST FANCY THAT!

COMMEMORATIVE brass plaques hung on the walls of Bakerloo Line Tube stations earlier this year were mounted using... double-sided sticky tape.

Nine plaques were put up to celebrate the centenary of a remarkable piece of engineering, but station staff were astonished when those at Charing Cross and Lambeth North stations fell off, revealing that they weren't firmly fixed to the wall.

Transport for London told the *Eye* the job had been done by maintenance contractor Metronet BCV, using "industrial strength" sticky tape because the walls were unsuitable for screws. Metronet said the plaques have now been "re-mounted with a stronger adhesive".

Letters

Private Eye

Golden Oldie

Sir,

I am writing to complain about the slanderous comments made about myself in a piece entitled "Called to Ordure" on page eight of issue 1169. I object particularly to the use of the phrase referring to me, "is, it must be admitted, embarrassingly useless in the House".

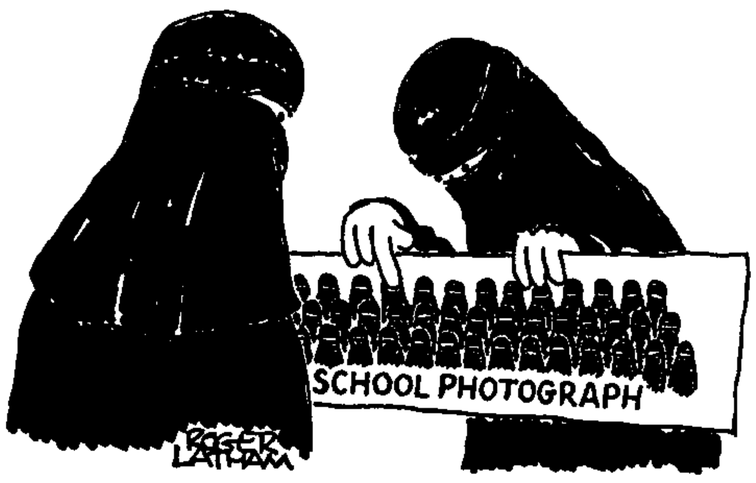
I do have a sense of humour and having been in politics a long time a thick skin, but I find your comments both offensive and baseless. I am active in the House as a member of the Constitutional Affairs Committee and also asking ministerial questions and making speeches on subjects important to my constituents. As one of just a handful of ethnic minority MPs and as an octogenarian I feel I have a distinctive contribution to make in the House and do so with some skill and capacity.

MPs of course do not work in the House as they are elected to represent their constituents and provide community leadership. I work hard to balance my efforts between the House and looking after my constituents. I hold regular surgeries and have one of the largest immigration and asylum caseloads in the country. I most definitely provide a useful service to the community and this I would suggest is why I have been elected for four terms with huge majorities.

Given the tenor of your piece, venerating the contributions of older members of the House, I was shocked to read your comments about me and had expected a little more respect being shown towards the oldest member of the House. I would hope that you feel able to revise your opinions and offer an apology.

Yours sincerely,
PIARA S. KHABRA MP,
Ealing/Southall.

House of Commons.



"That's me, there"

Crossed lines

Sir,

Either you or your quoted source have confused Southall 10 Sep 97 and Ladbroke Grove 5 Oct 99. Only the latter involved Thames Trains, while the former featured an HST slicing through stone empties, in 1997, not 1999. A rare bevue indeed.

Yours faithfully,
R.M. CAMERON,

Via email.

● R.M. Cameron is right – it was Ladbroke Grove that Thames Trains was fined for, not Southall. Our mistake, sorry. Ed.

■ UK children drink five litres of cooking oil a day with their pack-a-day crisp habit, according to the British Heart Foundation

Independent

Scenes You Seldom See

"Nothing loud or anti-social. Just give me a box of sparklers"

SOLUTIONS

"A simple, fresh, boxed catering solution brought to you from MYO" – *sandwich*

"Jacksons Fine Fencing: protection and security solutions" – *fence*

"Dandelion Lifestyle Management: just simple lifestyle solutions" – *PAs*

"Arbelos: Solutions for Mathematics Enrichment" – *teaching aids*

"Widcombe Dental Solutions" – *dentists*

"Lexmark Setup Solutions" – *instruction manual for printer*

All submitted by readers

Pillorying Piloti

Sir,

Re Nooks & Corners, 1170.

I'd always thought this column was about architects and architecture and could in the process at least be trusted to contain a modicum of objectivity.

This time, however, it is nothing but a rant, a complete load of sour grapes motivated by personal jealousy and bitterness. The Eye can and must surely (sic) do better.

Yours sincerely,
TIM HALL,

Via email.

Ribbing RIBA

Sir,

The Stirling prize (Piloti, Eye 1170) is now irretrievably the sole preserve of the architectural glitterati and it's appropriate that the annual love-in should be presented by an interior designer, whose single club "contemporary" reference to all buildings included in his "Grand Designs" TV series is cringe-inducing in the extreme. Equally, his gimlet eye for a soft target for buildings deserving of demolition is another indicator of the trend.

The Gold Medal is an entirely different matter and the RIBA should be profoundly ashamed of ignoring several UK practices responsible for producing budgetary-constrained buildings of high quality and fitness for purpose over many years – Edward Cullinan being a prime example.

GORDON PETHERBRIDGE,

Buckingham.

Privatising the NHS

Sir,

Intrigued by Daryl Bamonte's attempts to purchase an Essex hospital on eBay, I decided to check out his assertions for myself.

He was absolutely right. Following a frenzied bid-fest, I am now the proud owner of Woodford Cottage Hospital for £3.95 pending Pay Pal clearance, and I enclose a genuine printout of the eBay item.

Yours,
RICHARD SEATON,

Southampton.

Question time

Sir,

Re: Freedom of Information – way around limit of request? As you will be limited in the number of requests you can make, so will all your readers. So here is a simple answer: recruit your readers to make the FOI requests on your behalf. If you only get 1,000 volunteers, and if each can make five requests per year, that's 5,000 minimum. I would have thought you would easily get plenty of volunteers from your subscribers.

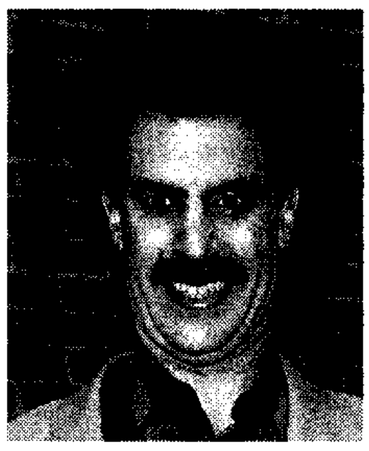
If you take up this suggestion it has to be worth some free subscriptions?

ADRIAN KERTON,

Stoke Gifford.

Lookalike

Borat



Stalin

Sir,

There seems to be an uncanny resemblance between the controversial Kazakh investigative journalist, known and loved in the UK as Borat, and a cheery young Georgian chap, known for cunning pranks in youth (and mass murder in his mature years) and nicknamed "Koba"...

SIAN GLAESSNER,

Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"When he gets among the balls he does the lemming thing like a kamikaze pilot and falls on his sword"
STEVE DAVIS, BBC2
(Mike Cliffe)

"John Higgins would know that if the cue was on the other foot he's expect his opponent to play to win"
JOHN VIRGO, BBC2
(Paul Astles)

"We're looking for fractions of a second here rather than tenths."
MARTIN BRUNDLE, ITV
(Steve Cockshott)

"In the second half, Barcelona threw caution to the window"
GARY RICHARDSON, Radio 4
(Gary Harding)

"Many of them have developed muscles on parts of their bodies that they've never had"
FITNESS COACH, Fulham FC website
(Hector Figueroa)

Notes & Queries

Sir,

Please may I be the loyal subscriber who points out to Mr Frank Upton of Solihull that although there are many marques which comprise the Volkswagen Group (Volkswagen, Audi, SEAT, Skoda, Bentley, Bugatti and Lamborghini), that Porsche is not one of them.

VW and Porsche have always maintained close business links, but Porsche is a separately owned German company. In fact, it is Stuttgart-based Porsche AG which owns a controlling minority in the Volkswagen Group.

Yours automotively,
ANDREW NICHOLLS,

Via email.

Sir,

Re: Rotten Boroughs Naborhood Resource Centre (Eye 1170). Sorry, your contributor cannot know local history. My aunt for very many years lived at 46 Sydenham Road (formerly known as 21 Empire Parade) and kept an ironmongers shop at number 48. The site of number 44 was occupied by a war damaged, Art Deco style cinema known as "The Naborhood" pronounced Narberhood. The other half of the site was a large air-raid shelter.

Yours faithfully,
JAMES MAURICE,

Via email.

Sir,

M.D.'s debating partner at the Oxford Union was Dr Howard Stoate MP. Not Harold. Not that it really matters.

Best wishes,
ROBIN HAWORTH,

Via email.

Sir,

Why is it Hazel Blears – not Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell – demanding that the BBC move to Salford should go ahead (Eye 1170)?

One fact you didn't mention: Blears is MP for, er, Salford.

Yours faithfully,
DR ALEX MAY,

Manchester, England.

Sir,

Does H. Martin (Letters, Eye 1170) not realise where the signal for a Freeview digital TV box comes from? Via the terrestrial aerial. So if Analogue TV don't work near Wembley Stadium, neither will Freeview.

DAVID WOOD,

Via email.

Sir,

With regard to Nicolae Ceausescu (covers, last issue), he never received a KCMG, or Kindly Call Me God, as it is nicknamed. He was never admitted to the Order of St Michael and St George, which is mainly reserved for diplomats. What he got was a KCB, or Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath, or in his case, the Order of the Bloodbath, followed by the Order of the Boot.

Yours sincerely,
TOM CARTER,

Somerset.

Sir,

I'm afraid to report a slight error with Mike Barfield's "Apparently" cartoon: "How clean is your house?" with President Kim and Aggie (Eye 1170).

Mike illustrates two cleaners; one bearing an uncanny resemblance to a North Korean dictator, and the other with long hair in a bun. So, that would, er, be President Kim and Kim then. Aggie is the spectacled Scottish scrubber, and Kim the peroxide matron of hygiene.

SERENA SNOAD,

Via email.

Letter from **Reykjavik**

from Our Own Correspondent

IT does sound ambitious. It is, after all, a plan to supply unlimited power to multinational aluminium corporations by damming all of our glacial rivers. And some people swore it could never happen. But we in the Icelandic government and our national power company knew better.

Critics called us corrupt, blind, corporate lackeys – but we stuck to our vision. And last month the clinking of champagne glasses in Reykjavik almost drowned the sound of rising water, as the flooding of Karahnjukar, the first dam in the series, finally began.

There has, admittedly, been increasing opposition to our plan. Most of it has focused on Karahnjukar, or the destruction of Europe's largest wilderness, solely to power a new Alcoa aluminium smelter. Magnus Magnusson fronted a documentary opposing it. Bjork's mother went on hunger strike. British MPs signed an early-day motion condemning it.

International environmentalists camped in front of the bulldozers and international musicians played benefit gigs. Thousands of Icelanders marched in protest against it. But now the waters are pouring in and the protected species are fleeing – and there's nothing anyone can do. And, remember, the Karahnjukar project, massive though it is, is only our first.

We've been holding private talks with the aluminium corporations, you see. They're desperate for cheap energy and are also under fire from communities abroad who claim to have been devastated by the toxic products of aluminium manufacture. Iceland has plus-points from Kyoto, endless supplies of hydro and geothermal energy and a very small (300,000) population controlled by a few, very powerful families. No wonder one of our ministers described our country as heavy industry's best kept secret.

And, sadly, we had to be secretive. A Gallup poll last year showed that almost 90 percent of Icelanders were against more heavy industry in our country. While, when plans for the Karahnjukar dam were first submitted to the National Planning Agency, they were rejected because of the "substantial, irreversible, negative environmental impact" the dam would have brought.

Of course our environment minister overturned that ruling. But there were other problems along the way. The scientist we commissioned to write the environmental impact assessment on the Thjorsarver dams turned out to be negative as well. So we were forced to sack her and falsify her report. We had to keep the price we were charging the corporations for the power a secret from our people too. And at one point, our high court even ruled that the planning permission for the Alcoa factory, which Karahnjukar will power, was invalid. Fortunately, Alcoa just continued building it.

Campaigners are now saying that our small Icelandic economy is already being devastated by the massive cost of these projects. Although we did promise that Karahnjukar would create local jobs, 90 percent of the workers were shipped in by Italian contractors Impregilo from as far away as Portugal and China. And it is true that this June our Prime Minister Halldór Ásgrímsson was forced to resign over the state of the economy, even though we had already sold off the national bank to finance our part of the deal. It may seem as though this is exactly what economists opposed to the project predicted would happen.

But then our environmentalists are predicting that the dams will result in dust storms, the destruction of our reindeers' breeding grounds, the silting up of our glacial rivers, widespread toxic pollution, the devastation of our tourist industry and even the possible obliteration of whole villages, since the Karahnjukar dam turns out to be built on a series of seismic faults. And who's listening to them? The corporations need energy. We need aluminium smelters. On with the next dam!

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"As soon as I saw that photograph of Laura Tennessen in the newspaper, I knew I had to sleep with her," Nicholas Grunke admitted to the Circuit Court in Grant County, Wisconsin. "She was so good looking that even when my twin brother Alex pointed out that her picture was on the obituary page, and that she'd just been killed in a motorcycle accident, it made no difference. We both fell in love with her immediately. So we found out where she was buried, put two shovels in the car, stopped at a Wal-Mart to buy condoms, and drove to St Charles cemetery in Cassville just before midnight. We intended to dig her up and have full penetrative sex with her. But just as we were clearing the earth away from the concrete vault where her coffin was, the police arrived, and we were arrested. So sadly, we never got to consummate our love."

Earlier, Grant County Sheriff Keith Govier had told reporters that "one of the crimes we study in abnormal criminal behaviour is necrophilia, and I guess that would be the motive here. The men were sweating heavily and were extremely nervous when we arrested them. At first they denied everything. They said they were fishermen looking for worms. But they finally admitted that they'd dug the deep hole that had partially uncovered Miss Tennesson's coffin, and that they'd planned to take her body back to their house to have sex with it. Apparently, neither man knew the woman, they'd just seen her picture in the newspaper and acted on impulse. It's quite disgusting. The woman was well-liked around here, and the community is very upset. They still can't quite believe it."

The Grunke twins were initially charged with sexual assault, but their lawyers successfully argued that third degree sexual assault can only occur if the victim is alive at the time of the attack. Instead, they were charged with criminal damage and attempted theft. *(Wisconsin State Journal, 6/9/06. Spotter: James Carter)*

– o –

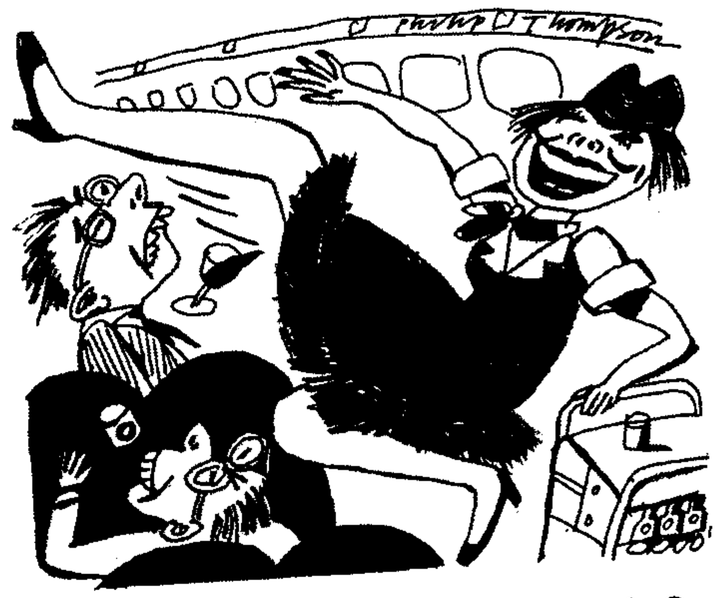
"It's probably the most unusual wanted poster the police have ever had," plastic surgeon Michael Koenig told reporters in Cologne, "but what else can I do? I've been robbed, and I hope that these 'before and after' photographs of breasts will enable the public to help us trace the thieves. In all, I've had five women who have cheated me out of money by not paying for their breast enlargement operations, and I'm sure they were all connected, because they all used the same trick. They all gave fake names and addresses, and asked for the same operation. And once it was over, they just ran away.

"One, who called herself 'Tanja,' said she just wanted to go outside for a breath of fresh air before settling the bill. That didn't seem unusual, but she never came back, and she never paid. It may sound trivial, but these operations use very expensive materials. They cost £5,000 each, and I want my money. And in future, I shall be demanding money up front, if you'll pardon the expression."

Photographs of Tanja's breasts were later published by Bild newspaper. (Taipei Times, 7/10/06. Spotter: David Jaques)

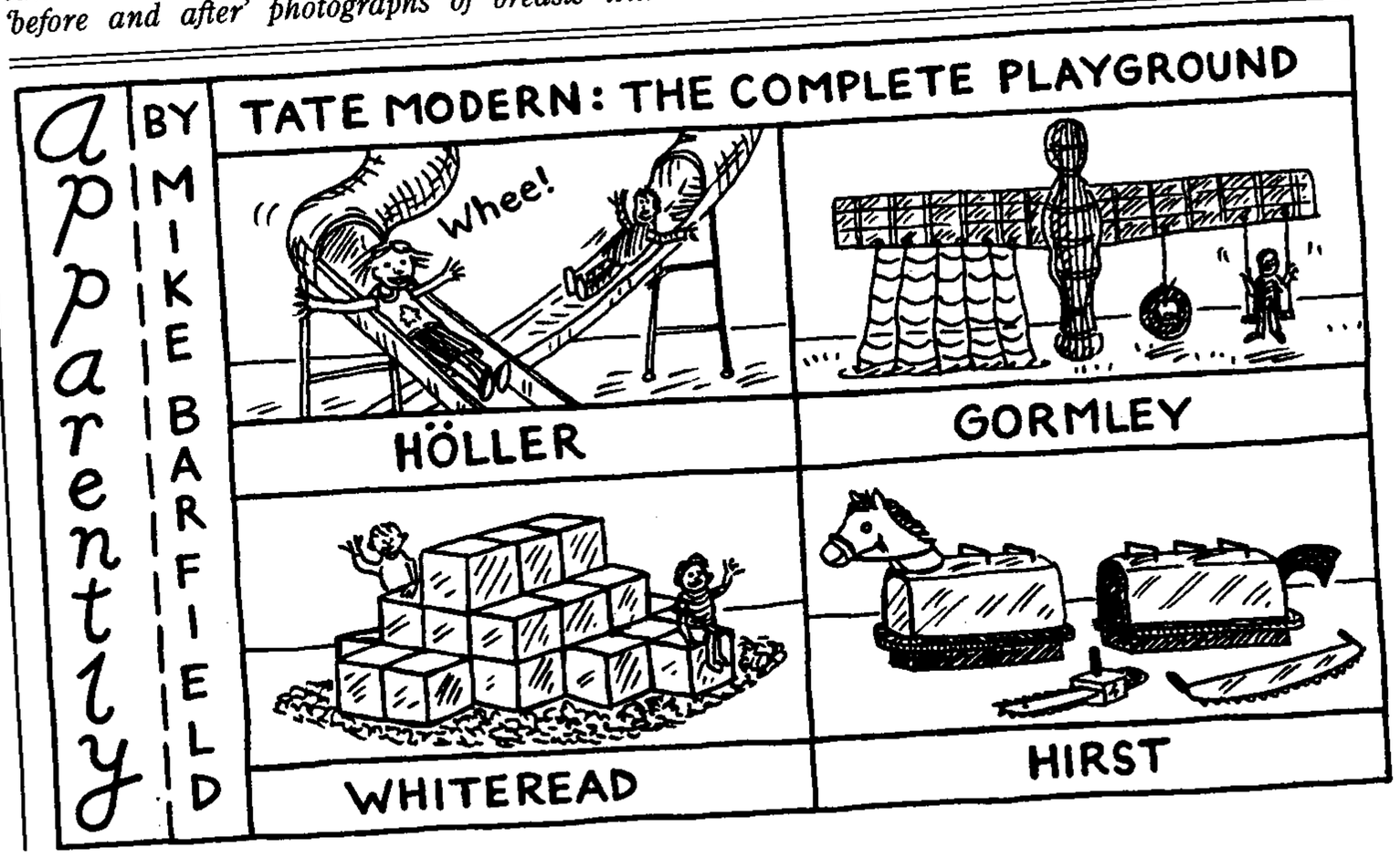
– o –

"Smiling and Kung Fu are the qualities we look for in an air stewardess," Fang Zhijun from the Human Resource Department of Sichuan Airlines told reporters in Chengdu, "and surprisingly few girls are gifted at both. Smiling with affinity is very important, so we ask all job applicants to grin for us, as soon as they have given their twenty-second self-introduction. If they do not show all eight front teeth while smiling, they are not considered beautiful



enough, and are automatically rejected. Over three hundred applicants were turned down yesterday for that reason.

"Then we ask those that remain to show us their Kung Fu skills. In today's dangerous world, the ability to disable a passenger is very important, and we consider martial arts expertise essential for an air stewardess. Sadly, fewer than a hundred out of the two thousand we interviewed yesterday passed both tests. But those two talents are what makes a Sichuan Airlines stewardess so special." *(Shanghai Daily, 28/8/06. Spotter: Chris Bower)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

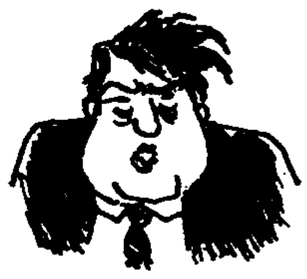
Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

In recent weeks our treasurer Mr Brown has been asking me almost every day whether he could take over this newsletter to write about various issues which he feels are of great importance to everyone in the parish.

Seeing that Christmas will soon be upon us, I thought I would show goodwill (not that I have ever seen much reciprocated – thank you Gordon!) by allowing him to have his say in this week's issue, and get whatever it is off his chest!

So please forebear, don't nod off, because Gordon takes over from this point onwards!



Good morning, everybody.

I have a very important message for you all.

We are all doomed. Do you hear me, doomed. And that's a quotation from the great prophet Frasiah from the Book of Dad's Army.

Mankind has sinned, and has polluted this beautiful planet with its filth and abominations.

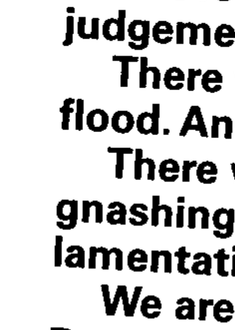
But rest assured. Divine judgement is now close at hand!

There will be fire. There will be flood. And no one will be spared!

There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. There will be lamentation and despair.

We are doomed, do you hear me? But there is a path we can take to salvation.

If you all reach deep into your pockets, a lot deeper into your pockets, and put a very great deal of your money into the weekly collection plate, then it is just possible that you may be spared from the terrible doom that awaits you...



Yes, Gordon, I think we've got the idea. But isn't this all exactly what I've been trying to say for years?

Obviously I *didn't* put it in such a dour and Scottish way (no offence, Gordon, but we're not in the Wee Frees here, you know!).

But I've said all along that my greatest challenge as your vicar is to save mankind from the terrible threat which is hanging over us – the threat of global warming.

As I've often said, this is the most serious issue ever to threaten the human race, more serious even than terrorism (although that is pretty serious, as I've also often said).

That is why I was the very first person in this parish to point out that we needed to take real action and not just talk about it, as was the theme of my series of talks in 2003, 2004, 2005 and again as recently as last week.

So let's not fool ourselves that Gordon is saying anything new here! Anyway, let's see if he's got anything really new to offer.

As I was saying, before I was so rudely interrupted, it is the moral duty of those of us here in St Albion's to set a shining example to the world on this issue.

That is why from now on I will be personally ensuring that we only use low-energy light bulbs in the vestry. There will be a solar panel on the church roof, thus providing sufficient heat to operate the church clock for an average of ten minutes every day.

And just as important as these contributions to saving energy will be my decision that we will equip the Scout Hall with a 'half flush' system which will enable us to save no less than 25 litres of water per scout per year, which is...

...hey, Gordon, we've already 'been there, done that, got the T-shirt'!

I am sure parishioners will remember only too well that I was saying all those things at least a year ago, just after I had launched my plan to abolish poverty in Africa!

I hope that you're satisfied, now that I have given you this chance to 'say your piece', and what a pity that you couldn't have found something a bit more original to say!

Yours,

Tony

IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM THE VICAR

A lot of people in the parish are getting over-excited at the idea that I might be sent to prison for giving people special privileges in exchange for money! What utter nonsense.

But in order to nail this lie on the head, I have asked my personal lawyer and good friend, Mr Goldsmith, to take an impartial look at the whole situation and to decide that there is no case to answer. What could be fairer than that? T.B.

INVITATION TO A FORMAL LYNCH

from the Rev. Dubya Bush, Chief Pastor of the Church of the Latter-Day Morons

Yee-hah! Saddle up, Tony, and head on out to Baghdadsville for the Lynching of the Year! That low-down coyote Saddam is gonna swing from the highest branch! Yessiree!!

The Evil One has been pulled from his hidey-hole to face Judgement Day from the Almighty's Marshall-on-Earth, Space Ranger Clint W. Bushwood, the Man With No Brain. *(Is this right? Ed.)*

So bring the kids for a fun day out and don't forget the apple pie and clambake hog brownies, mmmm, just like Mama used to tell the coloured folks to bake!!

Don't be late for the biggest hanging we've ever had!!

Yo-yo Blair!!

'Cause that's what Saddam's going to look like a-danglin' from the gibbet!!

Yours in the Lord,
Rev. Lameduck Bush

(Are you sure this is right? Ed.)

Dress: Stetson and black tie. Guns may be worn.

BRITISH CONSULATE
BASRA: IRAQ

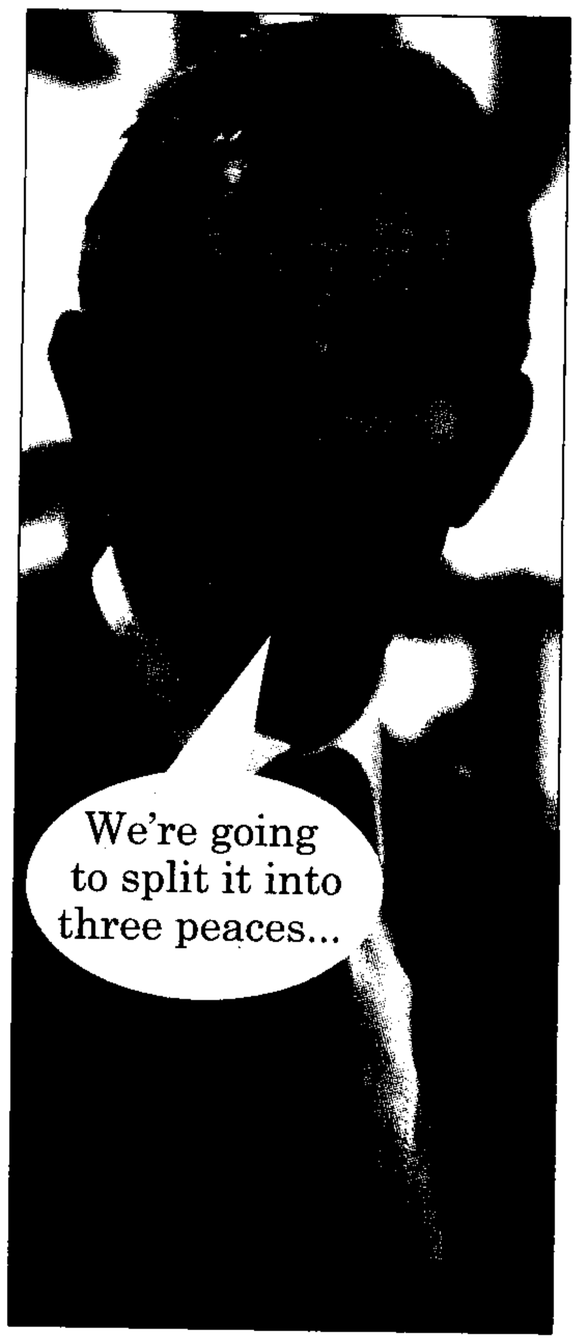
Opening times

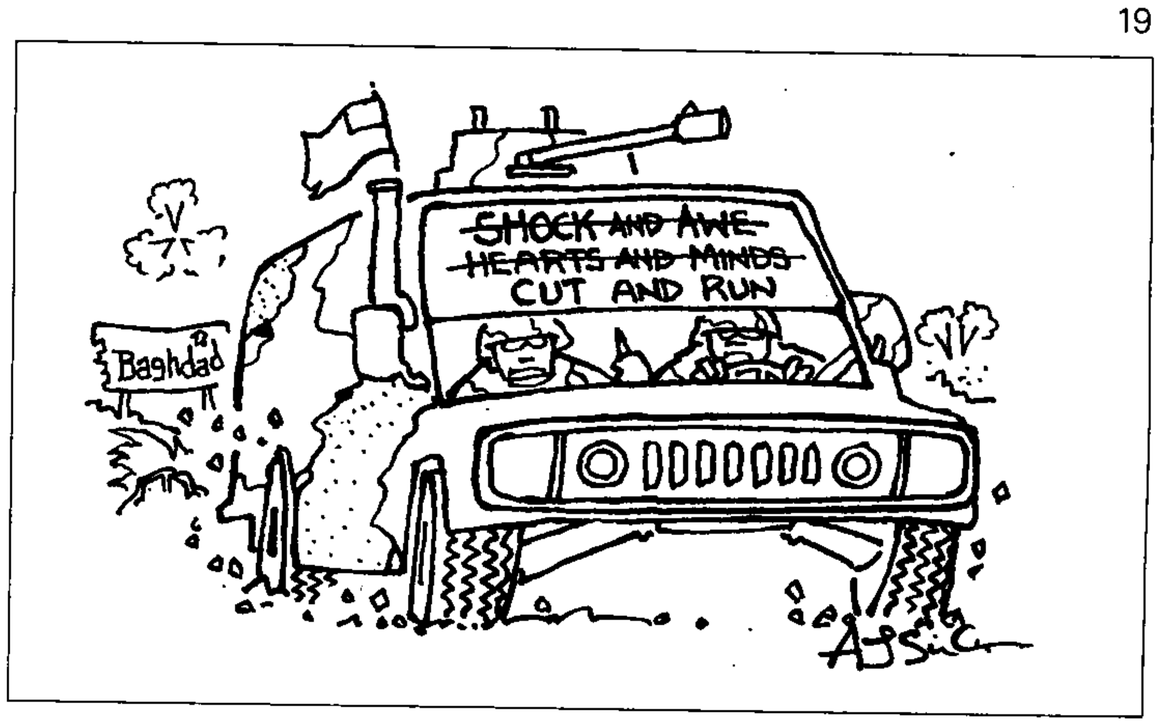
SUICIDE BOMBINGS
9.30am – 3.30pm
Monday to Friday
Those wishing to bomb the Consulate outside those hours must apply in writing at least two weeks before they hope to embark on their journey to paradise.

MORTAR ATTACKS
11.00am - 2.00pm
Monday/Wednesday/Friday
No incoming mortar attacks will be accepted outside these times.

SMALL ARMS SHELLING
2.00pm – 5.00pm
Monday to Friday
Those wishing to shell the building during these hours should form an orderly queue in the designated marked zone (A) at the right of the entrance to the building.

IRAQ PEACE





A Baghdad Cabbie writes

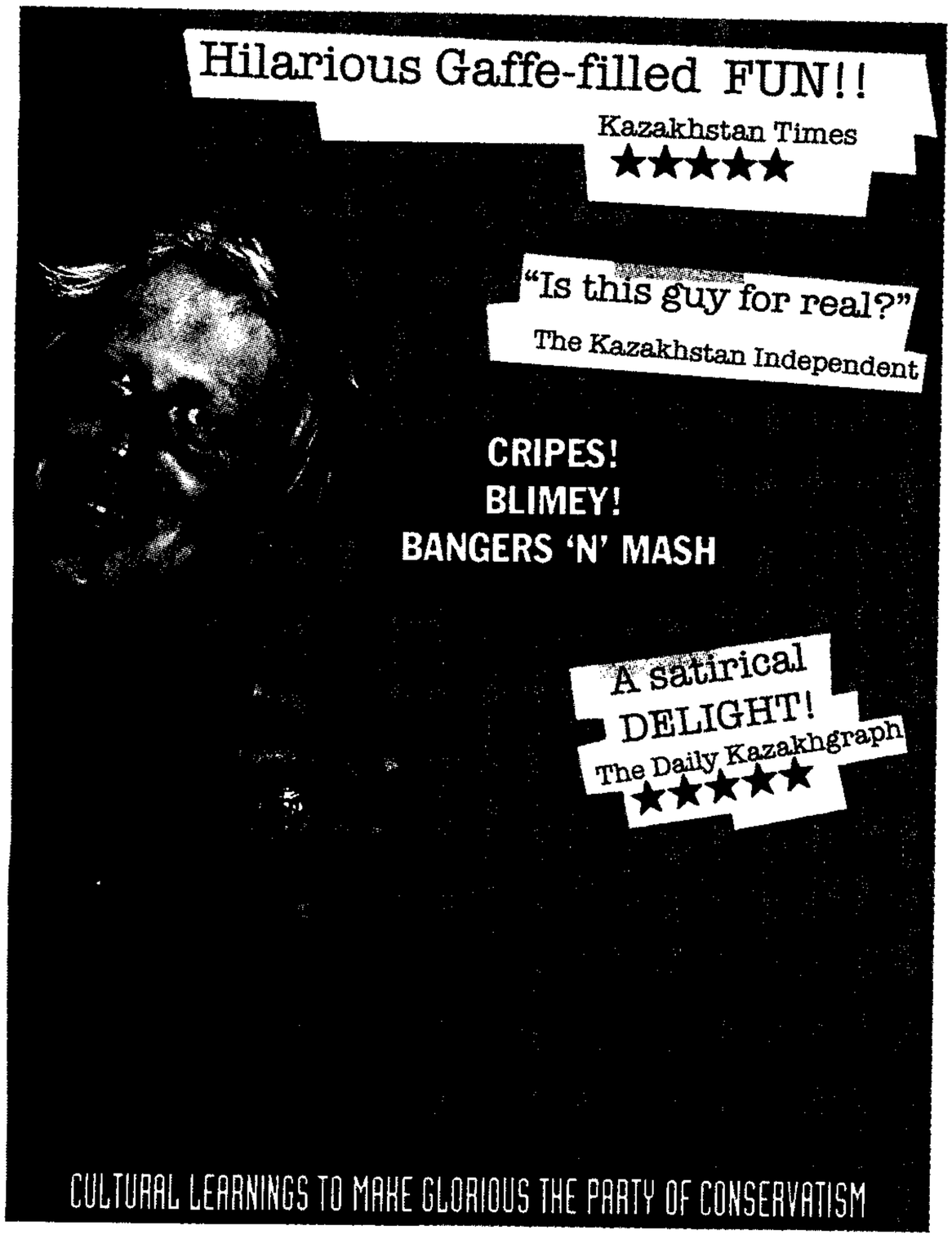
EVERY week a well-known taxi driver is invited to comment on an issue of topical importance. This week **Muqtada Al-Rizmog.**

That Saddam Hussein! What a nasty piece of work, eh, guv? Shooting people and torturing them and gassing them to death. I mean he's a bastard – or Baathistard, as I call 'em – ha ha ha, just my little joke guv gotta keep smilin' round 'ere or you'd go mad, no, to be serious, if you want my opinion they shouldn't string 'im up no I mean it, what's going to happen? You don't have to be a rocket scientist although I was before I got this job, chemical weapons was my thing but, no, it's obvious isn't it, Saddam will be a martyr to the Sunnis, the Shi'ites will be over the moon, then they'll be at each others throats and yours guv, I'd keep that window wound up if I were you and lie on the floor. 'Allo, what's this? I had that.... (huge explosion rocks city) aaargh!!!

Next week: Becky Wade 7374278, Britain's foremost female cab driver on "Was Saddam a Paedo?"

ADVERTISEMENT

IN CENTRAL ASIAN CINEMAS NOW!



DIVORCE OF THE CENTURY

WAR OVER SECRET MACCA TAPES

by Phil Columns

HEATHER MILLS-MCCARTNEY today sensationally upped the ante in her acrimonious divorce proceedings by demanding that tapes showing Paul McCartney in a bad light be played openly in court. Her lawyer, Anthony Jollirich, said, "These tapes are dynamite. They reveal so-called music legend Sir Paul McCartney to be nothing but a cruel and callous monster".

The tapes recorded by "friends" of Sir Paul and the late Linda McCartney are said to make "uncomfortable listening" and would severely embarrass the former Beatle if played in public.

Those Tapes in Full

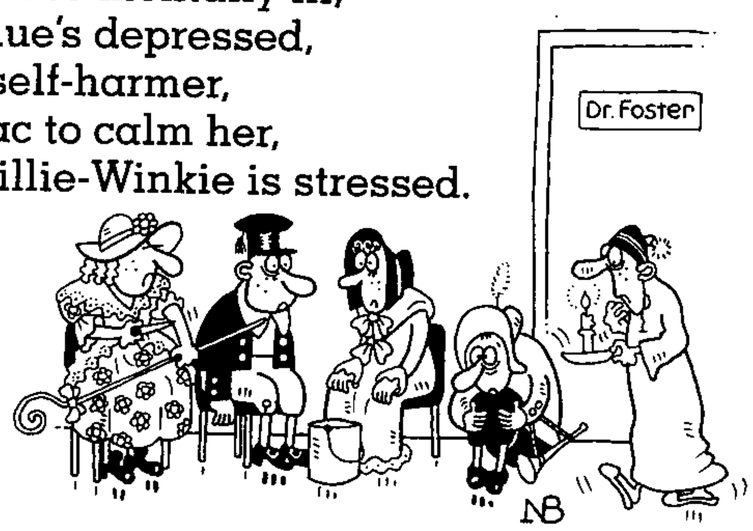
1. Mull of Kintyre
2. Frogs' Chorus
3. The Best of Wings

Late News

● Macca buys up secret tapes for £200m.

MODERN NURSERY RHYMES

Jack and Jill are mentally ill,
Little boy Blue's depressed,
Bo-peep, a self-harmer,
Needs prozac to calm her,
And Wee Willie-Winkie is stressed.



Duchess of Love

by DAME SYLVIE KRIN, author of *La Dame Aux Camillas*, *Heir of Sorrows*, and *Born To Be Queen Consort*.

THE STORY SO FAR: Charles and Camilla are going on a ground-breaking visit to Pakistan.

Now read on...

"MR President, honoured guests, would you please welcome from the United Kingdom, His Royal Royalness King Charles and his lovely bride the Duchess of Marlborough."

The turbanned and moustachioed Master of Ceremonies clapped his hands, as the band of the 21st Lahore Lancers struck up with "Happy Birthday To You".

A beaming Prince Charles, dressed in a short-sleeved, lightweight, tropical safari suit specially made for his visit by Roger Moore's of Savile Row, entered at the top of the ornate marble staircase of the Presidential Palace ballroom. Turning to Camilla, ever by his side, he whispered "You know this amazing staircase was built by Arkwright & Son of Derby in 1902 and installed to mark my great-grandfather's Durbar in the days when the Marquess of Solihull was the Viceroy."

But Camilla was not listening. She was basking in the warm and sustained round of applause that greeted the Royal couple's arrival.

The whole of Pakistan's high society was there in front of them. Wasn't that the Imran of Khan, the well-known former husband of Jemima Goldsmith?

Camilla didn't recognise any of the others, although she was sure that they were all very famous and important – the cream of the country's elite in fact, all turned out in their finest, just for Charles and her.

It was a far cry from the days when she had to be smuggled into the back entrance of Highgrove, hidden under a smelly dog blanket in a Sudoku 4x4.

As they descended the great stairway, like tiny figures on a giant wedding cake, Camilla felt every eye in the room was on her.

How glad she was that she had decided to wear a version of the traditional ceremonial dress of her hosts, the shimmering white and gold *shalimar kamikaze*, designed for her by the lady owner of Country Casuals in Tetbury.

The President of Pakistan himself, His Excellency General Mustapha Moustacha, stepped forward with a low bow to greet the couple and led them to their seats on the top table.

The President introduced Camilla to her distinguished table companions:

"Princess Camilla, may I present to you the Shoaib of Akhtar, the Akond of Swatch and Air Chief Marshal Mohammed Ahmedgeddon, who is in charge of our nuclear strike capability, and who also has the largest collection of Elvis records in the whole of Islamabad!"

Camilla was on cloud nine and also a little peckish. She had had nothing to eat since the bag of Duchy Organic pretzels they'd been served on the Royal Flight that morning.

Almost as if her hosts were reading her mind, the dapper Master of Ceremonies clapped his hands again to proclaim the arrival of the food.

"Your Royal Majesties, Mr President, distinguished generals, I have great honour to announce that, in honour of our honourable guests, we are tonight serving the most famous of all traditional British dishes... chicken tikka massala!"

The audience clapped and cheered at the thought of the exotic culinary treat that awaited them.

Who in the world had not heard of the celebrated British love of this remarkable concoction, served in its familiar silver tin-foil cartons, accompanied by an elegant can of English-brewed Cobra lager...

AS THE waiters cleared the last of the coffee and served the alcohol-free Islamic brandy, Charles rose eagerly to his feet.

This was to be possibly the most important speech he had ever made.

For once he felt that he was standing at the very centre of world politics.

This wasn't just the usual routine Royal flimmery-flummery. This was the real thingie.

As the world divided between the West and Islam, he was the only figure on the global stage who could sort of bridge the gap.

"East is east, and west is, you know, west," he began. "But how untrue that is, when you think about it. In fact it really is appalling that anyone could say such a thing in this day and age..."

AS THE palace clock chimed midnight on the celebrated set of 24 bells cast by Fothergill & Sons of Dewsbury in 1911 to mark the Durbar of his great-grandfather King George V, Charles came to the closing passage of his lengthy but impassioned plea for peace and reconciliation between the two great world faiths.

"And that is why," he ended, "I am going to make this very important symbolic gesture by visiting one of these madrassa thingies, which are so misunderstood in the West.

"I mean, some of us know that they are centres of spiritual learning. But a great many people see them only as hotbeds of fanatical extremist Islamic terrorism, which need to be rooted out and destroyed."

At these last words, the guest on the prince's right, a highly-decorated general in dark glasses, carrying a ceremonial Kalashnikov assault rifle to symbolise his role as Head of Internal Security, jerked awake, looked worried and began talking quietly and urgently into his mobile phone...

THE morning sun was already scorching through the mosquito nets around the four-poster bed, originally built by Mitchell & Webb of Harrogate to mark the Coronation of Charles's grandfather King George VI, as Charles and Camilla woke in the guest suite of the presidential palace.

How different this all was, Charles thought, from his last visit with Diana all those years ago, when all they could talk about was what his wife was wearing.

No, this time it was about him, and the hugely important role he could play in world politics as the Defender of World Faiths – "Defensor Fidelio", as he planned to be proclaimed at his own coronation.

There was a discreet knock at the door and a smiling servant entered, bearing a freshly-ironed copy of the Lahore Daily Telegraph.

Charles eagerly snatched the paper to see how his speech had been presented.

"The Prince of Peace" was the kind of thing they would probably do, he thought. A bit over the top, but not without a grain of truth.

But what was this? A great big picture of Camilla with the huge headline "She's wearing the same dress as Di did ten years ago".

Charles feverishly searched through the paper, only to find more pictures of Camilla and Diana on almost every page.

But where was his speech? The servant came to his rescue. "The general has asked me to alert you, sir, to the item on page 94, which shows that your concerns about these madrassas have been very much addressed."

He gave Charles a wink and pointed to a small piece below the crossword.

"Madrassa bombed to smithereens – hotbed of fanatical extremist terrorism is eliminated – Royal visit cancelled."

Charles sank back on the pillows in horrified disbelief. His dejection was interrupted by the cheerful tones of the servant who was holding out a silver tray covered in a white linen cloth.

"Your breakfast, sir... it's chicken tikka massala..."

To be continued.

The Alternative Rocky Horror Service Book

(as now incorporated into Common-or-Garden Worship)

No. 94 A Service of Remembrance for the Fact That We Live Today in a Multi-cultural Society

The President *(for it is she)*: We are gathered together here today to forget whatever it is that we used to remember in less enlightened times.

All: Yeah, what was that?

President: We shall not remember all those who laid down their lives in militaristic adventures such as i.e. the First World War, the Second World War, Vietnam and all that sort of thing. I mean, they were obviously terrible events, but, you know, it hardly resonates nowadays with our modern world. I mean, we're more concerned with trying to make modern Britain a more inclusive, tolerant society of all the faiths, not just going on about people killing each other which, frankly, to my mind is totally negative.?

All: At the going down of the sun and in the morning we will not remember them.

(There shall then be played "The Last Post Office". The President shall then read out the Roll of Honour, including the names of all those who have moved into the parish in the last year)

President:

Yarosplod Poplovsky
Lukas Poplovsky
Oglot Toku
Sandor Mendic
Osambu Onanugu
Ahmed Mahmood
Mehmet Mahmood
Mahmood Mahmood
Peregrine Worsthorne

(The President shall then call for a two minute silence for everyone to meditate on how far Britain has moved on from the days when we used to make a big deal about people who had died in wars and things)

Hymn

I vow to thee my country
All earthly things above
We all live here together now
And all you need is love.

(Members of the congregation will then celebrate in their own fashion whichever festival seems most relevant: e.g. Diwali, Eid, Chinese New Year, Hallowe'en, the Winter Solstice, the December Sales.

Poppies shall then be collected and burned in the font as a symbol of forgetting whatever it is that we no longer need to remember)

BRITONS SET NEW RECORD

by Our Sport Staff **Lunchtime O' Verbudget**

BRITONS today claimed a new set of Olympic records as they went faster, longer and higher than any other nation in Olympic history.

Here are the British team's extraordinary results:

- **Fastest exit of an Olympic project manager, Jack Lemley (USA), in an astonishing 7½ months!**
- **Longest building delays predicted (1.7 years!) since records began.**
- **Higher construction costs than ever before – reaching a breathtaking £5bn!**

Said a spokesman for the team, "It makes you proud to be British. This is something that this nation excels in. The Greeks may have invented Olympic building delays but we have picked up the baton and run with it – unlike the athletes who won't have a stadium, a transport system or any accommodation."

However, government spokes-man Seb Coe said, "Mark my words, the 2014 Olympics will be absolutely on time."

THAT HISTORIC STERN REPORT IN FULL

We're All Going To Die Unless We Pay More Tax

1. **Global warming is the greatest threat which has ever faced the human race.**

2. **Unless very drastic steps are taken immediately, human life as we know it will end in the next five minutes.**

3. **It is now an unchallenged fact that, as CO_2 levels soar to unsustainable levels, scalding hot giant tsunamis will sweep across the world at millions of miles an hour, leaving a path of unprecedented devastation in their wake.**

4. **No form of life will be left unscathed, from the mighty elephant down to the humblest bacteria.**

5. **That includes the human race, who face imminent and painful extinction unless extremely drastic steps are taken by responsible governments acting in the best interests of humanity as a whole and those of future generations.**

6. **It is too late for mere talk. It is now the time for action – and unprecedentedly drastic action at that.**

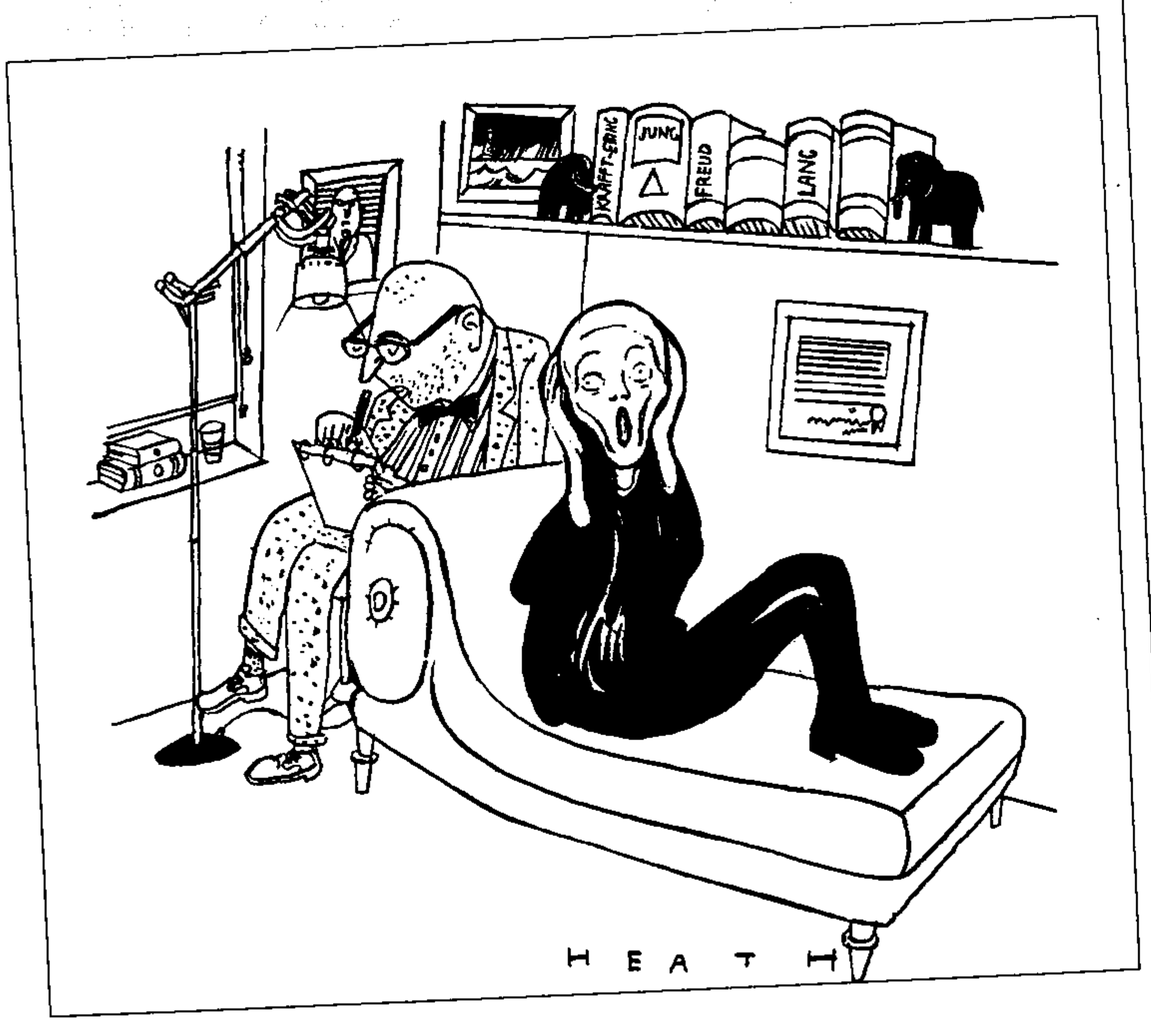
7. **There can be no half measures.**

8. **There is only one possible way in which the planet can be saved from a fate too horrible to imagine.**

9. **Taxes will have to be raised immediately. And by quite a lot.**

10. **And, to be honest, Gordon's run out of money, so this end-of-the-world thing couldn't have come at a better time.**

©The Very Stern Report
Commissioned by H.M. Treasury



GLOBAL WARMING – COULD IT BE THE ANSWER?

by Our Science Staff **Roger Highthere** and **George Monbiofuel**

SCIENTISTS were today hailing what they called "the answer to the Stern report" – the discovery of a new emission-free, low-carbon source of energy which could provide Britain with a clean power source for hundreds of years into the future.

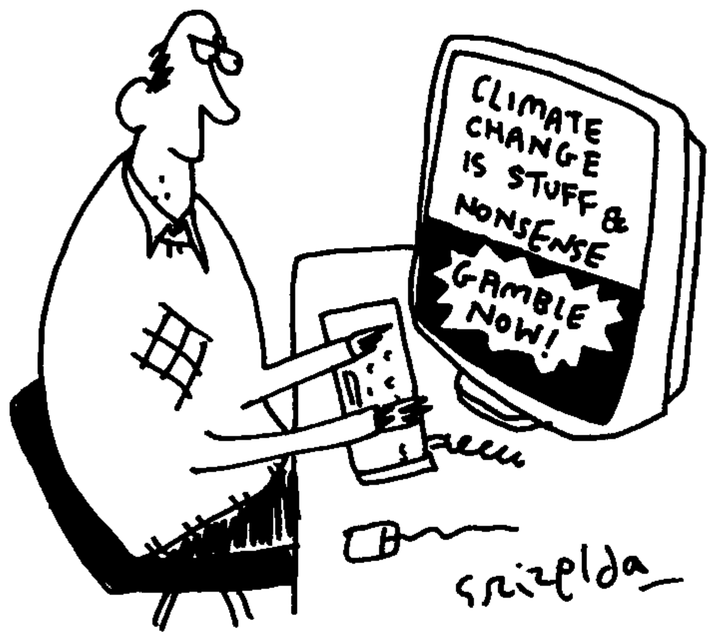
The unlikely technological breakthrough came when researchers stumbled on huge reserves of unsold copies of David Blunkett's book *I'm Really Pleased With Myself.*

"We could not believe our luck," said one scientist. "There are literally millions of these volumes just lying around in warehouses all over the UK.

"Forget windfarms and solar panels – if you want a really sustainable, cheap fuel source, here is something for which there is no other use and which the world will not miss."

It has been estimated that just one copy of the Blunkett autobiography would provide the equivalent of the Dungeness B power station.

Alternatively, it could be traded on the world's carbon exchange market for the whole of China's Hangseng Industrial Zone.



SEX FIEND AMIS 'WROTE NOVELS' Sensational Claim

BY OUR LITERARY STAFF SUSANNAH GROSS-PROFIT

NOTORIOUS womaniser and alcoholic Kingsley Amis is revealed in a new biography to have lived a secret life as a novelist.

"Whilst everyone thought that Amis was just getting drunk and getting his leg over," says biographer Zilly Bleader, "the reality was he was a compulsive author who couldn't keep his hands off the typewriter."

Friends of Amis were left reeling from Mr Bleader's shock revelations.

"I'm still trying to come to terms with it. All the time we thought he was a drunken womaniser, but it turns out he was nothing more than a famous novelist."

Mr Bleader's incredible revelations include:

- **Amis wrote a book called "Lucky Jim".**
- **He had a son who is also addicted to writing.**
- **He was friends with Hull librarian Philip Larkin who was also a secret poet.**
- **The Daily Mail will buy any old rubbish to fill up its pages.**

Daily Mail

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2006

GLOBAL WARMING MEANS END OF WORLD AND POSSIBLE HOUSE PRICE COLLAPSE

By **Lunchtime O'Pocalypse**
Environment Reporter

A GOVERNMENT report, hailed by Tony Bair as "the most important document ever published in the history of the world", predicts a terrifying scenario for mankind in the very near future.

As temperatures soar to levels which will make all life unsustainable, and sea levels rise by an estimated 120 feet, flooding more than 90 percent of the earth's land mass, experts have told the Mail that house prices in the south-east of England may collapse by as much as 20 percent.

Shock

This catastrophic end of the world scenario could mean that a typical 4-bedroom detached family house in Godalming could see as much as £75,000 wiped off its asking price, overnight.

Said Sidney Greenslade, 71, a retired accountant, who lives with his wife Pearl, 69, in Chertsey, Surrey, "we bought our executive bungalow in 1987 as our pension scheme."

Horror

"Now we find that the sun is about to fry the earth to a crisp, and where does that leave me and Mrs Greenslade? I blame the government."

And the story was the same throughout Great Britain, as hard-pressed, decent, hardworking homeowners read through the 565-page Stern report with a sense of mounting despair.

First-time buyers wept openly in the streets as the government report condemned them to death by drowning as the ice caps melt before they had even got a first foot on the property ladder.

© Dacretras Productions, Kneejerk House, W8.

DAILY EXPRESS

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2006

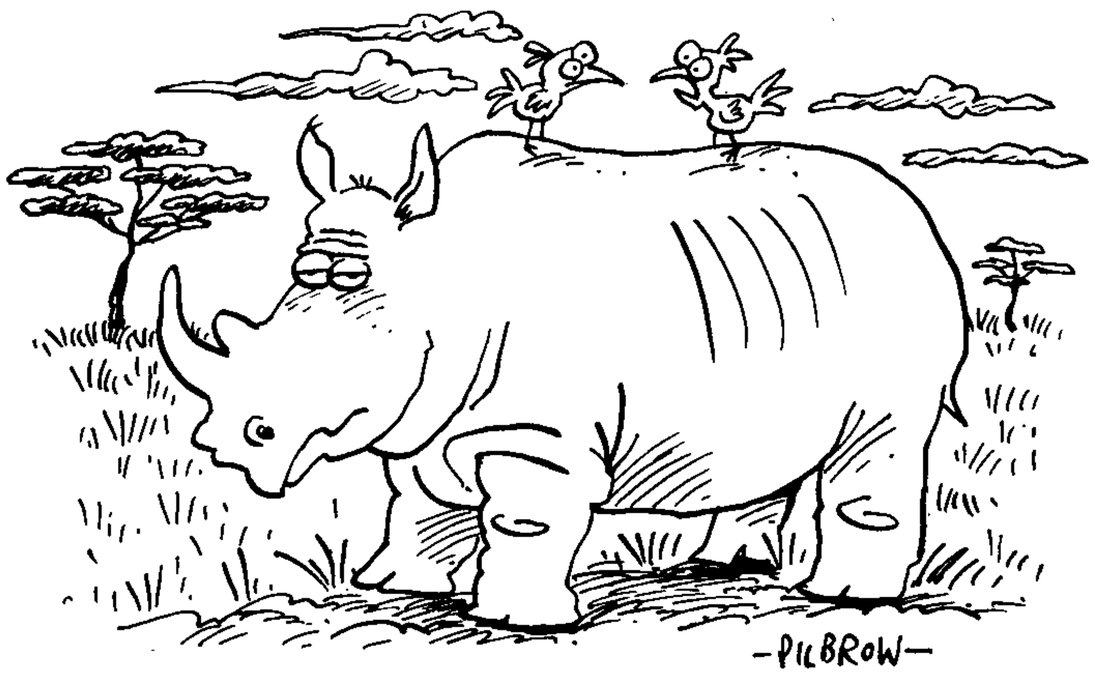
DID GLOBAL WARMING KILL DIANA?

By Our Entire Staff
Con Spirazzy and **Maddie Tupp**

SCIENTISTS yesterday revealed that the Arctic winter that descended on Paris ten years ago causing Princess Diana's Mercedes to skid on ice whilst trying to avoid a polar bear driving a white Fiat Uno was actually caused by global warming on the direct orders of the Duke of Edinburgh.

Duke of Attenborough

Said one meterological expert yesterday, "A thick fug reduced visibility around fuggin' Paris because the fuggin' Duke ordered MI6 to increase fuggin' carbon emissions all over the fuggin' (cont. every Monday)



"I sometimes wonder if we really need such a big vehicle"

What you will hear on the new look 'Classic Radio Three FM'

9am-12pm
Composer of the week:
Vivaldi

12pm-9pm
Rodriguez Guitar Concerto

9pm-12am
Pachebel's Canon and Albinoni's Adagio

12am-9am
Composer of the week (rpt):
Vivaldi

News In Brief

STERN – LATEST

THE STERN Report has issued a stark warning that there may only be a few years left to save the Government.

"The Government must immediately start recycling David Cameron's green tax agenda so it can tackle the problem of the gradual thawing of the British public to the idea of a Conservative Government.

"If not then the level of Tory voters could rise and completely submerge Gordon Brown," said Professor *(cont. p. 94)*

WEB WARNING

THE British developer of the world wide web, Sir Tim Berners-Lee, says he is worried that if the internet is left to develop unchecked, "bad things" could happen.

"I'd hate to think that some day in the future there might be a site dedicated to unsavoury things like pornography on the net," said Sir Tim *(cont. p. 94)*

POLICE OUTRAGE

SCOTLAND YARD has begun an urgent inquiry after one of the police marksmen involved in the killing of Jean Charles de Menezes actually shot dead a suspected armed robber during a botched bank raid in New Romney, Kent.

"We want to establish exactly how this situation could have gone so tragically right," said a Police Inspector.

SURVEILLANCE SHOCK

THE Information Commissioner Richard Thomas said measures must be taken to stop Britain becoming the most spied on nation in the world as a result of the increased used of CCTV technology and information databases.

"I propose that we must immediately begin monitoring these CCTV cameras round the clock and compiling a database of all the names of people already on databases in Great Britain, to establish just how much unnecessary surveillance is going on."

Stella does admit she gets tired at the end of a hard shit but admits she would not want to be doing anything else.

Solihull Observer

HUTTON'S SHOCK VERDICT ON HIMSELF

by Our Legal Staff **Michael Whitewash**

AFTER AN extensive 45-minute inquiry into his own conduct during the Hutton Inquiry, Lord Hutton last night reached his conclusion.

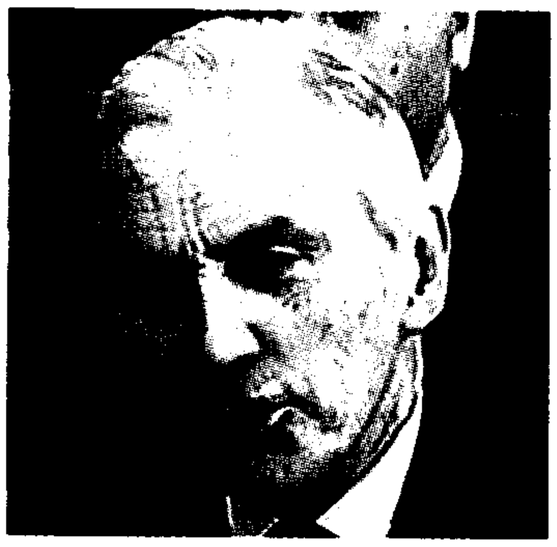
"I did nothing wrong and I was completely justified in clearing myself."

He continued, "I have looked at the evidence, ignored it and found myself entirely innocent of any blame. The fact that the Hutton Inquiry later turned out to be a disaster is not my fault."

"At the time, I did not know that I was completely wrong, and I acted in good faith in letting the government off the hook and blaming the BBC."

Judge Dreadful

The judge reacted angrily to suggestions that his latest verdict was "another whitewash".



"It would have been all too easy for me," he said, "to have come to a sensible conclusion, but that would have been to ignore my duty as a judge conducting an independent inquiry, ie to exonerate myself of all wrongdoing." *(Cont. for 94 pages)*

HESTON BLUMENTHAL'S
Cooking Made Easy Recipe Book

No. 94 The Boiled Egg

1. Build nuclear reactor and pre-heat to 4000°C.
2. Buy egg.
3. Insert egg in fissile core for 0.000073 seconds *(Tip: use gloves)*.
4. Remove egg and place in liquid nitrogen tank *(Tip: at least 2000 litres works best)* to cool.
5. Remove top of egg using Laser Canon with Infra-Red Guidance System *(Tip: I get mine from the Bioweapons Department at NASA!)*.
6. Serve with toast. *(See yesterday's recipe and don't forget to use the Particle Accelerator at CERN!)*

Enjoy!

© Heston Blumensilly, The Fat Duck Restaurant, Stuffs.

"'If you've done nothing wrong, you've nothing to fear'... WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT? EH?? EH???!"

MADONNA ADOPTION ROW LATEST

by Our Showbiz Staff Buyz Babyboy

BBC's Newsnight programme was in hot water last night over its controversial adoption of a white billionairess called Madonna.

Critics claim the programme simply bought Madonna up, flew her into their studios, and then pretended that this was normal procedure.

Baby David Dimbleby

"This is disgraceful," said one adoption expert, "Madonna should stay in her own home with her own family rather than be paraded around by a cynical BBC programme that wants a fashion accessory."

Kabollax

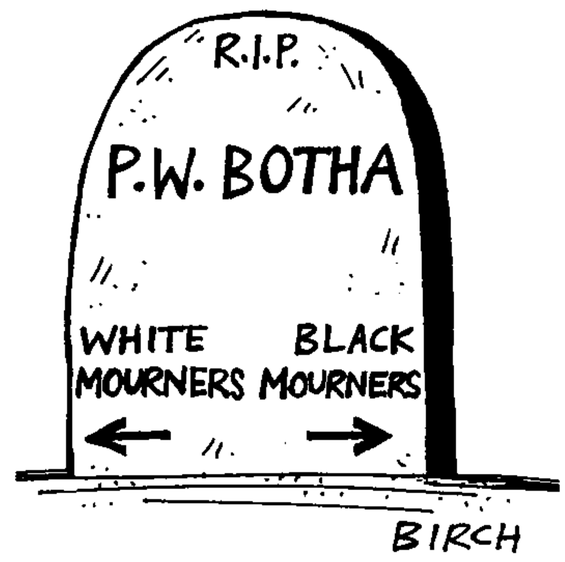
However a spokesperson for Newsnight, Miss Kirsty Walkalloverme said, "Why are we being criticised for giving Madonna a warm loving environment in which to talk rubbish and promote her rotten new book?"

She continued, "Isn't it enough that we want to help one little popstar? Without us she might have been starved of publicity and her career might have died. Now she is a happy, bubbly celebrity and we have got some ratings. What's wrong with that?"

Miss Kirsty Walkalloverme then posed for publicity pictures cuddling her adopted superstar.

TORY MP LEAVES WIFE FOR MALE INTERIOR DESIGNER

There have been terrible clashes at home
Hmmm... that Moroccan throw rug in the sitting room simply doesn't go with those curtains



POETRY CORNER

William Franklyn, actor and voice of the Schweppes tonic water commercial.

Schhh. Farewell then
You know who.

E.J. Thribb
(Scheventeen and ½)

DIARY

VICTORIA BECKHAM: MY FASHION SECRETS

Why is a T-shirt called a T-shirt? That's a question David and I often ask ourselves.The conclusion we've come to is that it's because it's a shirt. Otherwise, it would be called the T-trouser or T-shoe, or whatever.

Buying a T-shirt is one of the most difficult decisions any of us will ever be faced with. There are just so many different ones to choose from, I really don't know how I manage, but over the years I've succeeded time and time again. I suppose I just put it down to experience. But it's a skill that ordinary people can pick up too, if they're prepared to listen.

When you're planning to enter a fashion shop to buy your T-shirt, be sure to check that the door is open else you could give your head a nasty bang. If you find that the door is shut, my advice is to give it a push with your hand, or, better still, get your personal assistant to push it for you. Who wants a girl with great big muscley arms? Certainly not my David!

The whole shop may be closed because it's not opening hours or whatever. This can be very inconvenient, especially if you're already rushed off your feet with your career and family, so best ask your agent to phone them in advance and get it to specially open for you.

VICTORIA'S TOP TIPS: If you crave a pair of new shoes, be extra careful not to go to a shop which sells only lingerie or woollens. Look for signs saying "shoes". If you really don't feel like going shopping at all, my advice is to leaf through fashion magazines until the mood passes. If the problem persists, consult your doctor.

So now you're safely through the door, you'll find the T-shirts in the T-shirt section, that's unless they've moved them for some reason without telling you. I once wasted a whole lot of time struggling into an evening gown because the T-shirt section had been moved and no-one had bothered to inform me, thank you very much.

Once you have successfully located the T-shirts, you must pick one that is your size and suits you. If you are very very large, you shouldn't pick one out that's marked VERY VERY SMALL because it probably won't fit.

My mum always taught me that to wear clothes which are in your size, because that way they'll fit better. It's a lesson I've stuck to ever since. Unless I want, say, a really big woolly jersey, in which case I'll go for one that's bigger, so that it looks bigger when it's on.

VICTORIA'S TOP TIPS: Can't find exactly what you're looking for? Put a call through to your friend top designer Roberto Cavalli and get him to make one for you.

I'm often asked if it's best to wear a white T-shirt or a black T-shirt, then let's never forget there's coloured T-shirts too. Choosing a coloured T-shirt is basically one of the most difficult things you'll ever be asked to do, because for one thing there are so many colours – not just blue and green but red and yellow and blue and whatever. Sometimes, if you don't have the time, it's best to buy all of them, so you can try them on at home.

My favourite T-shirts are by Azzedine Alaia, they are just really well-made basic runaround T-shirts for everyday wear with simple diamonds sewn in. For those who can't afford real diamonds, you can always get inexpensive fakes, which are fine if you haven't been invited anywhere special and you're luckily not a VIP with a fan-base.

Wearing a T-shirt with a top designer's name on it is a great way to express yourself. And there's so much you can do with a T-shirt, like get hair extensions, or take it off at the last moment switch it for a Little Black Dress or something fabulous by Dolce e Gabbana.

VICTORIA'S TOP TIPS: Good does not necessarily mean expensive. It's how you feel inside that's important. I am just as happy slobbing around in a £95 frock from a high street chain inside, then I'll change into something more stylish before going out.

Most top designer shops and high-street fashion stores have dressing rooms specially set aside for customers to try clothes on in. If you find there already other people in them trying clothes on, don't worry, just get your assistant to have a word with the store manager and she'll get them removed.

It's funny, but dressing rooms often have mirrors on their walls. For a long time, David and I wondered why this was. David thought it might be so that you could see if anyone was behind you, but we were told by a top fashion expert that it was so that you can look at yourself in your new clothes before buying them, which is a really great tip to pass on.

VICTORIA'S TOP TIPS: If you want to be sure to find just the right shoes for the right occasion, purchase 25 pairs at the same time, one for each of your upstairs rooms.

Picking a T shirt may not be easy but trying it on is even more difficulter.

Basically, a well-made T-shirt generally comes complete with four holes. There's a medium-sized hole for putting your head through, two smaller ones for putting your arms through and then there's big one which is basically for your body. If you get it wrong by just a matter of inches and try putting your head through an arm-hole, you could end up in intensive care, so whatever you do you must be careful to aim right.

And that's not all. The other nightmare is finding you've put it on back-to-front. If that ever happens to you, my top tip is to get your assistant to take it off for you, then put it on you again, only this time the right way round.

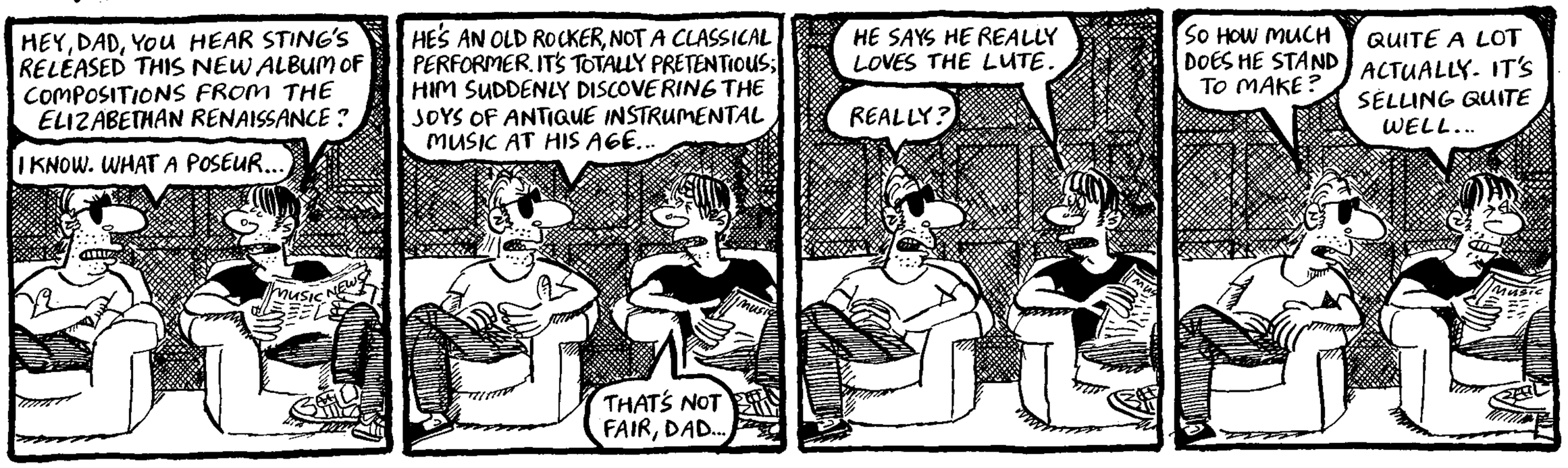
Alternatively, you can try taking your arms out through the holes, then turn your T-shirt round 180 degrees, then put them back in again. Sometimes David makes the major mistake of turning it round 360 degrees and then he gets cross when he finds it's still the wrong way round.

Congratulations! You have now bought a fantastic super-sexy new T-shirt! When you get it home, be sure to try it. That way, you get to enjoy it at least once before it seems old and boring, and you have to go shopping again for something newer.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


HEY, DAD, YOU HEAR STING'S RELEASED THIS NEW ALBUM OF COMPOSITIONS FROM THE ELIZABETHAN RENAISSANCE?
I KNOW. WHAT A POSEUR...
MUSIC NEWS
HE'S AN OLD ROCKER, NOT A CLASSICAL PERFORMER. IT'S TOTALLY PRETENTIOUS; HIM SUDDENLY DISCOVERING THE JOYS OF ANTIQUE INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC AT HIS AGE...
THAT'S NOT FAIR, DAD...
HE SAYS HE REALLY LOVES THE LUTE.
REALLY?
SO HOW MUCH DOES HE STAND TO MAKE?
QUITE A LOT ACTUALLY. IT'S SELLING QUITE WELL...
MUSIC

Literary Review

Whitehall farce

Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties

Peter Hennessy

(Allen Lane, £30)

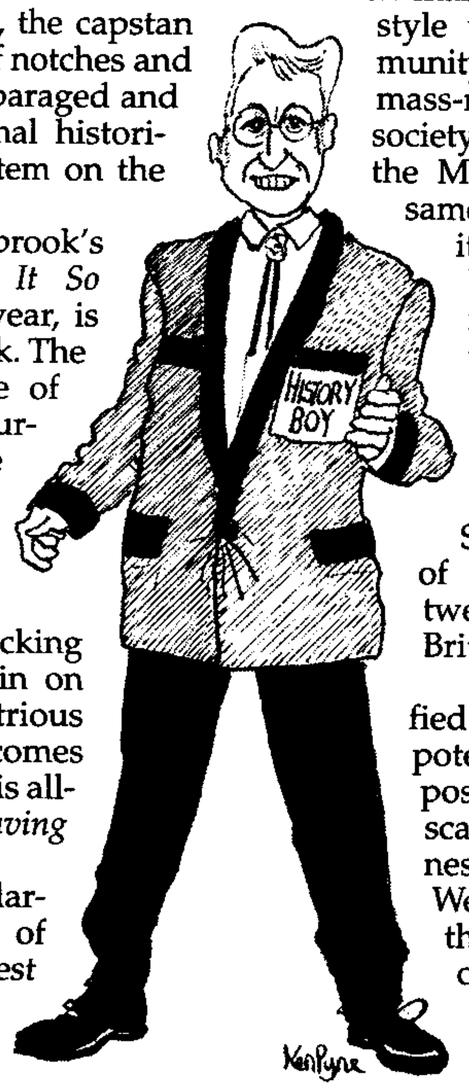
ODD THING, modern history. Until fairly recently no one could get enough of the 1970s, trades union militancy, the end of the post-war consensus, Mrs Thatcher's rise and all the rest of it. Now, all of a sudden, the capstan has shifted a couple of notches and the 1950s, so long disparaged and ignored by professional historians, are the hippest item on the block.

Dominic Sandbrook's excellent *Never Had It So Good*, published last year, is newly out in paperback. The first groaning tranche of David Kynaston's four-volume take on the period 1945-1979 is due next spring. And here, weighing down the scales at 740 pages, and no doubt kicking itself for not getting in on the act before industrious Master Sandbrook, comes Peter Hennessy with his all-too similarly titled *Having It So Good*.

Potential readers, alarmed at the prospect of duplication, should rest assured. Just as particular decades go in and out of fashion, so do the ways in which historians approach them. Sandbrook is a hearts and minds man, for whom what Kingsley Amis said to Philip Larkin in a back-bedroom in Cardiff is quite as important as what Hugh Gaitskell said to Aneurin Bevan on the House of Commons terrace. Hennessy on the other hand is a veteran prowler of the corridors of SW1 (see his definitive study *Whitehall*), perennially absorbed by *haute politique*, index card file simply bursting with recherché detail on obscure Tory grandees, and the result is one of the most peculiar books on modern British history in a very long while.

The peculiarity lurks in Hennessy's inability to force himself out of the procedural groove in which the corridors-of-power historian invariably gets stuck. He knows that there's a whole world out there beyond Harold Macmillan's cabinet table, he knows that history-writing has gone all democratic just lately, but he can't *quite* summon the necessary interest to go out and take a proper look at it. The spirit is willing, but the socially-minded flesh is weak.

Having It So Good starts with a discussion of Richard Hoggart's seminal *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), which charts the decline of old-style working-class "community" and the arrival of mass-market consumer society – two key themes of the Macmillan era. In the same vein, 491 pages later it quotes Eric Hobsbawm – approvingly – to the effect that "The Fifties are the crucial decade. For the first time you could feel things changing. Suez and the coming of rock-and-roll divide twentieth century British history."



And having identified two of the more potent symbols of the post-war British landscape, what does Hennessy do with them? Well, his treatment of the Suez Crisis, its origins, course and implications, grinds learnedly on for so long that I began to feel that I knew Anthony Eden's gall bladder more intimately than the contents of my desk drawer. Quiff-haired, guitar-strumming Bill Haley, alternatively, here seen as rock-and-roll incarnate, gets a good deal less space than the other William Haley, Director General of the BBC and editor of the *Times*, while Cliff Richard and Tommy Steele rate not a single index reference between them. And so it goes on for several hundred thousand words: sedulous analyses of Downing Street confabs and a page or two on working-class consumerism; four references to the Buckingham Palace bureaucrat Martin Charteris and one to Bobby Charlton. Four for Minister of Labour Walter Monckton and none for Max Miller. Of the "establishment", that oligarchical abstract whose existence historians have been zealously disputing for the past half century, there is, apparently, no mention at all.

Of course Hennessy knows his stuff about the politics; and the morphing of one Tory administration into another, Common Market preliminaries and the end of empire are all patiently unravelled. But you could get a better idea of what life was actually like in the Fifties from an old Simon Raven novel. Imagine a history of your own family which concentrated on fluctuations in your father's salary, your siblings' O-level results and the mortgage rate and you'll get some idea of this volume's deeply partial and restricted focus. I was left with a vision of two of three rather elderly ghosts, grimly caballing in the attic of some stately home, while several floors below, all gay and unregarded, a tide of holiday-makers canters out into the park.

Big Blather

Chantelle – Living the Dream

(HarperCollins, £16.99)

Pete – My Story

(Century, £17.99)

THIS late in the literary day, it's rare for a whole new form to emerge. But, amazing as it may seem to younger readers, six years ago the genre of autobiographies by *Big Brother* winners didn't even exist. And, though Nick Bateman's *Nasty Nick* and Jade Goody's *My Autobiography* have to some extent prepared the way, it is only now that this particular shelf of the library achieves its *Moby Dick* and *Pride and Prejudice*, with the publication of the recollections of this year's winners of the house-share franchise.

All young celebrity autobiographers face the question – or, more likely, their ghostwriters do – of how much space to give to the bit before they got known. The current publications of Billie Piper, Jack Osbourne and Wayne Rooney are not immune from this problem. But at least those memoirists have some concrete achievements: Billie has done some big telly acting and divorced a controversial disc-jockey; Jack has a famous mad dad; and Wazza has been sent off in a World Cup for stamping on Portuguese gonads. So the early years can at least be mined for clues to their later lives.

Chantelle and Pete, though, have had for only a few months a recognition which is already rapidly diminishing and have never done anything except win a TV show which involves no skill. As a result, 300 pages is a lot to fill.

It's probably not a good sign that **Pete – My Story**, the confessions of the Tourette's-afflicted winner of *Big Brother 7*, devotes the whole of the opening chapter to a detailed account of his mother's labour pains. It's page nine before the hero even comes out. When chapter three turns out to have the heading "Baby Minders", and indeed proves to be a comparative survey of the various au pairs and sitters left in charge of the future reality TV victor in his infancy, all but the strongest readers may start to panic about whether the publisher has fatally miscalculated the equation of content and dimensions.

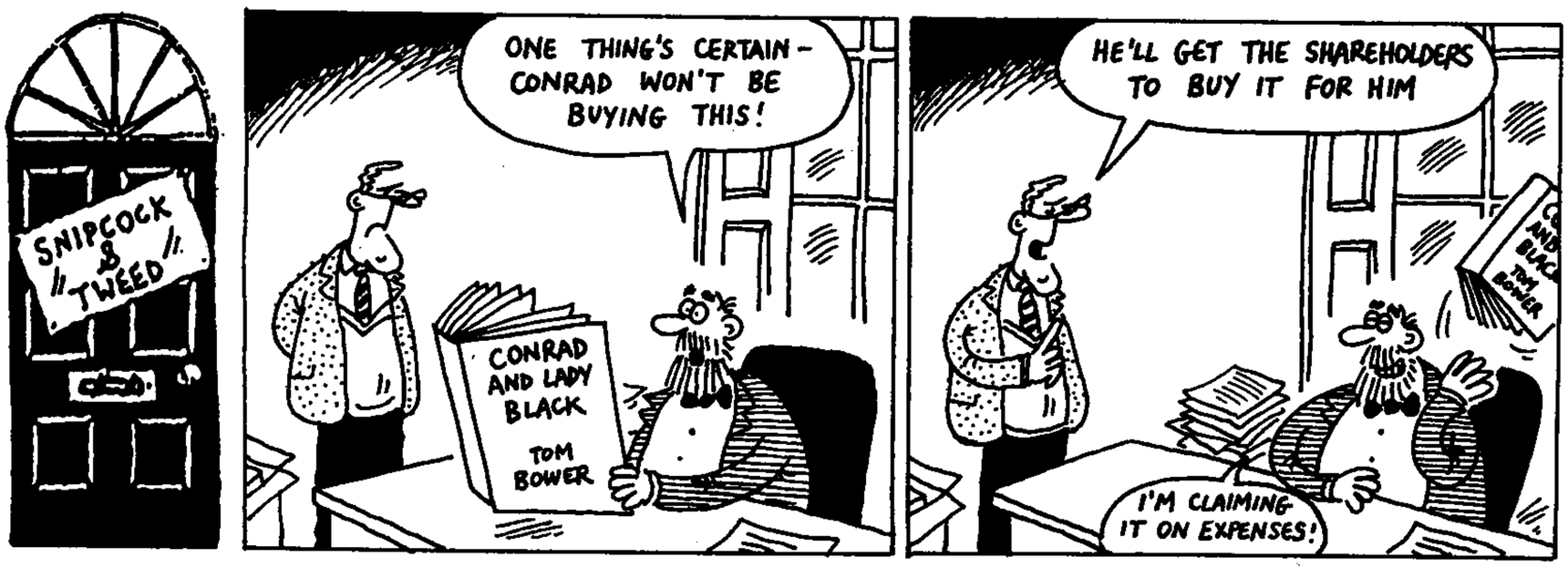
The thing picks up a bit with the diagnosis of Tourette's and the death of a friend during a drug-fuelled prank on a railway track, which are at least experiences most people won't have, but whoever has written the book (unusually, no one is thanked for "helping" Pete to get his thoughts down) has taken the strange decision to allocate only one chapter to the *Big Brother* house, which might be assumed to be of most interest to the almost unimaginable readers who might actually want to buy this book.

Although running to around 80,000 words, the length of a proper book, the text barely has the depth of a text-message. Padding out another page with a mention of a trans-gender neighbour, Pete comments: "It seemed a bit wild to be changing sex in order to have a lesbian relationship, but variety always makes life a bit more interesting." You have the constant suspicion that the work of the HarperCollins editor has consisted of excising "like" from the middle of sentences and "whatever" from the ends. On page 290, everyone gives up and the last part of the volume is a collection of doodles called Pete: The Gallery.

Chantelle, the Essex nonentity who won *Celebrity Big Brother 2006* by convincing her housemates that she was really famous, thanks the journalist Jean Ritchie for "helping me to write" **Living the Dream**. Unlike Pete's people, Ritchie has favoured a conventional division, in which 50 pages are given to the early years and the remaining 200 to the BB experience.

But, even in such a brief spin through the author's formative period, Ritchie is forced to include information which a Claire Tomalin or Roy Jenkins might, on balance, omit from a biography: "Our uniform was navy blue: we wore trousers and a blazer, with a white shirt and a navy tie with light blue stripes." There's a whole paragraph on why the family dog is called Boycey: "Everyone thinks he got his name from the character in *Only Fools and Horses*, but..."

But this nightmare of vapidity and self-obsession reaches its zenith when a whole two pages are given over to Chantelle's attempt to make her hair look blonder and longer: "My extensions are probably the


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
ONE THING'S CERTAIN – CONRAD WON'T BE BUYING THIS!
CONRAD AND LADY BLACK
TOM BOWER
HE'LL GET THE SHAREHOLDERS TO BUY IT FOR HIM
I'M CLAIMING IT ON EXPENSES!

most famous extensions in Britain, and it sometimes seems that every female journalist in the country has an opinion on them."

Many critics have argued that authors writing books they know to be bad or meretricious will signal there distress through metaphor: lots of references to sewage or resuscitation, for example. But Chantelle's ghostwriter's use of the dominating image of artificial lengthenings which rip the small amount of real stuff from its roots is perhaps the greatest example of this phenomenon.

What's most astonishing is that HarperCollins and Century, respectable-ish publishers, should ever have thought there were books in this. There might be sense in Pete's or Chantelle's memoirs being sent out on a podcast or DVD but they clearly hav e no place on paper.

'Booker Man'

"To be honest, I'm not all that well read, they're all celebrity biographies"

Books & Bookmen

■ IN HIS *Observer* review of Tom Bower's book about Conrad Black, Peter Preston notes that Bower has done his standard job – "150 interviews, 434 pages, a formidable array of facts and fiddles". But Preston isn't happy about it. "We need to know the names of the unspecified 150 who gave Tom his interviews," he explains.

Actually some sources are named. Perhaps there's a reason why others aren't: that they spoke on condition of anonymity. Just because Preston (as editor of the *Grauniad*) betrayed Whitehall whistleblower Sarah Tisdall, thus earning her a spell in jail, does he expect other hacks to do likewise?

■ LOOKS like the Christmas turkeys have arrived early for Bloomsbury. Content to throw their Harry Potter proceeds around like confetti, it signed several big names this year with hopes for bestseller status but they are failing to deliver.

Take That's Gary Barlow's autobiography sold to his fans for the first couple of weeks but is now dropping off at an alarming rate, The Blunkett Tapes have proved such a flop that retailers are giving up and trying to send stock back and the £40 illustrated biography of Nelson Mandela is ludicrously over-priced and is now being slashed by shops in a desperate attempt to flog it off cheap.

■ Correction of the week, from the *Guardian*, 1 November:

"A report headed Beam me up Scotty – and misquote me for better effect, page 4, October 25, misquoted the title of the book from which it was quoting. It is not They Never Said That. It is What They Didn't Say."

■ IN A move that had *Guardian* readers choking on their muesli, the paper last Tuesday devoted a quarter-page in its news section to a photograph of Posh Spice, captioned "Victoria Beckham at a signing for her book, *That Extra Half an Inch: Hair, Heels and Everything in Between*, at Selfridges in London yesterday."

Any readers unclear as to why this was deemed more important than such topics as the Commons vote on an Iraq inquiry, Prince Charles's visit to Pakistan, the criminal charges against David Mills and the US elections might benefit from knowing one fact (curiously omitted from the paper's coverage): Beckham's book is ghost-written by Hadley Freeman, the *Guardian*'s deputy fashion editor.

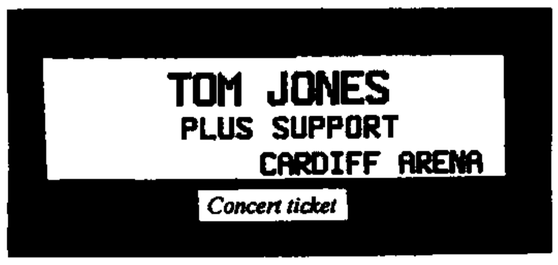
■ SO THE last Ottakars store has been converted to the dark side and the black livery of Waterstone's now adorns the front of James Heneage's old empire. However, this has not really been the most professional of shopfitting jobs.

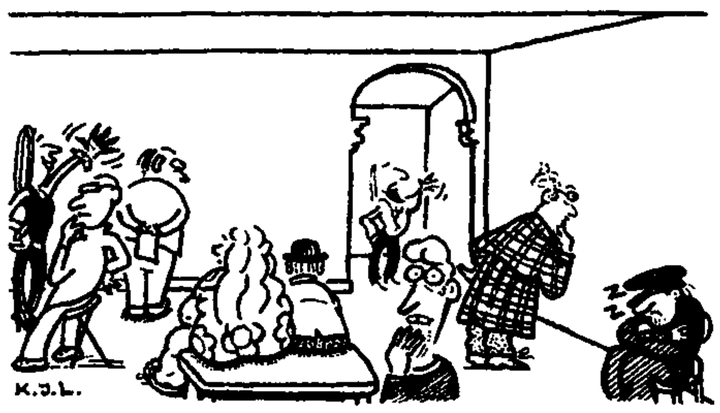
Obsessed with hitting the deadline announced to the industry, the new management team have gone at things in a rush and, in some stores, have literally just slapped some black paint on the front. Eagle-eyed *Eye* readers are claiming that they can clearly see the Ottakars logo showing through underneath. Wishful thinking? A positive metaphor?

'Bookworm'

First Drafts
This is going to terrify people
An immigrant from Eastern Europe is smuggled illegally into the country
Pearsall

Bram Stoker





US artist Matthew Ronay likes to make waves. A sculpture in his solo show at Parasol Unit shows middle-aged men dangling from nooses, with their genitals exposed – auto-erotic asphyxiation as metaphor for the decline of civilisation.

NADIM SAMMAN
The Art Newspaper

An artist has been given a grant to put on an exhibition consisting of nothing but an empty gallery. Simon Pope, aged 40, said the aim was to encourage people to walk around the empty rooms and discuss memories of other galleries.

A Chapter spokeswoman said: "We set agendas, we don't follow them." She said participants in the exhibition could perform "a seemingly impossible feat: summoning up remote spaces – through memory, body, speech and movement – reduplicating the spaces, so that they exist at two locations simultaneously."

Report on the Chapter Gallery, Cardiff, BBC News website

I don't really fit in at school, and round where I live I get loads of hassle just for the way I dress. The other day this kid I went to junior school with didn't recognise who I was and

came up behind and grabbed me by the arm going, "Eh, blud? You got any money?" or something like that. I think he was about to try to mug me. Then when I turned round he realised who I was and was like, "Hey, Sam! I ain't seen you in time. How's it going?" But that kind of thing happens quite regularly. It's really not easy wearing tight jeans in south-east London.

Club promoter SAM KILLCOYNE
Observer Music Monthly

People know when I'm thinking something through as I wander round the office humming to myself – Bach especially, interspersed with Monteverdi, Handel, or Schutz.

Director of Cambridge University's Careers Service GORDON CHESTERMAN from an interview in *Cam*, the Cambridge alumni magazine.

For Amy Winehouse, music is not just a defence mechanism. It is her lifeline. In the two years since [her debut album] Frank caused such a ruckus by presenting this voluble and extraordinary human being centre stage, Amy thinks its [sic] only circumstances that have changed, not her. But you can see it in her increasingly creative body art, her slightly more aggressive eye make-up and the great swoop of black hair that cascades across her face and down her back. This time, Amy Winehouse has charted her progress from girlhood to womanhood. She is untangling her mess, finding her true spirit and learning to break loose from the demons that have followed her.

Press release

I didn't sit down and strategise my way to an image of a sightless humanoid with genitals growing out of its head in a funny hat. It just evolved from things connecting, triggering.

CARROLL DUNHAM on her new show at the White Cube, Hoxton

I'm not even all that comfortable saying "I believe in God", for that makes it sound a bit like a pseudo-scientific opinion about the universe. I would rather say that I affirm the rhetorical tradition in which God is the most basic reality.

THEO HOBSON
Guardian

Ebb Cast evokes nuances; it meditates from all angles; it lives inside the inside; it balances the flow and stasis; it is simple and complex at the same time; it reveals hidden melodies and blurs the edges; it searches and settles.

Programme note for a performance of 'Ebb Cast' by Colin Riley by the Piano Circus, Poole Lighthouse.

CONTRIBUTORS: Anya Matthews, Charles Aptaker, Philip Coulthard, Dr M.A. Falzon, Keiron Pim, David Hugo, Niall Gooch, Alice Hamilton.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

ETHICAL FOREIGN POLICY

Seen but not Kurd

THE recently-leaked Cabinet Office memo outlining a foreign policy dream list of how the British government would like the world to look in years to come included a striking reference to the Kurdish people in Turkey, Iran and Iraq.

Kurds in all three countries are seeking independence and have taken up arms at some point. According to the memo, however, to head off any future danger of terrorism, the oppressed Kurds will just have to put up and shut up – or, to quote the memo, be "acquiescing in their treatment".

While Foreign Office Minister Douglas Alexander regularly tells parliament that Britain is keen on Turkey softening its approach to the Kurds, the cabinet paper, revealed by the *Sunday Telegraph*, suggests that Tony Blair is coming round to the US's more hardline approach to Kurdistan – an approach that seems intimately bound up with arms deals.

The Turkish government is angry that the Kurds of northern Iraq have not stopped PKK guerrillas organising in its territory. PKK, classed in London and Washington as a terrorist organisation, is fighting for Kurdish independence from Turkey.

The US has sent a retired general, Joseph Ralston, as an "anti PKK coordinator" to Iraq and Turkey. Comments from Ralston and the US government suggest Ralston thinks the solution lies in cracking down on the PKK, not entering into talks or taking the group's ceasefire offers seriously.

Coincidentally Ralston sits on the board of warplane maker Lockheed Martin. His firm is about to sell billions of dollars worth of F-16 and F-35 jets to Turkey. Turkey has often used F-16 jets to attack suspected PKK bases, so the new planes are likely to have a direct role in any future crackdown.

Some British names are also linked to the deal. BAE Systems is a major subcontractor on both the F-16 and F-35 jets. As well as working together on the jets, both Lockheed and BAE fund the American Turkish Council, a lobby group aimed at strengthening US-Turkish commercial and defence links. General Ralston also sits on this group's advisory board.

General Ralston has other British links. He is also vice-chairman of the Cohen Group, an international military-oriented lobby firm led by a former US secretary of defence. The Cohen Group includes Lockheed among its clients and has former Labour defence minister George Robertson on its staff.

Ralston has other British fans too. A few years back Geoff Hoon said: "General Ralston is a very, very impressive commentator on NATO issues." *Private Eye* asked the Foreign Office if Britain backed General Ralston's Kurdish mission. It said that the "troika is a trilateral process between the US, Iraq and Turkey, and Britain is not a party to the talks".

EMPIRE PROPERTY

Cash 'n' carry-on

ONE of the most contentious developments lined up in east London is Pioneer Point – a £97m, 33-storey twin-tower structure on the site of the old Pioneer market in Ilford. Criticised by an official building watchdog for "poor, inappropriate design", the tower nonetheless gained London Mayor Ken Livingstone's approval. But any architectural controversy is set to be eclipsed by the murky business histories of the men behind it, which the *Eye* can now reveal.

Leading the project for developers Empire Property Group is one Tom O'Donnell, who variously styles himself "chief executive officer", "managing director" and "international development director" of the firm even though he isn't legally an Empire director. And pushing the development equally hard is Empire's chief adviser on the deal, property consultant and chartered surveyor Martyn Guess.

O'Donnell and Guess have teamed up profitably before, notably on a deal with a Swedish consortium to build a shopping centre called Sergel City in Stockholm in the mid-1990s when Guess was a partner in the same firm of property surveyors, Hartnell Taylor Cook (HTC), that is now promoting Pioneer Point.

O'Donnell and Guess's efforts in Sweden were run through a company called Agora International UK Ltd. But this wasn't the only firm they had interests in: there was also an outfit confusingly called Agora International Ltd. The similarity of the companies' names, however, concealed a world of financial difference. The latter was registered not in the UK but on the Caribbean tax haven of Nevis – not widely known as a centre for Scandinavian construction. So what was the company for?

Letters from O'Donnell and Guess to the Swedish consortium – which included the City of Stockholm itself – demanded that payments for Agora's services were made to "Agora International". Unknown to the Swedes, who thought they were dealing with a respectable British company, many of their cheques then went straight into the bank account of the Nevis-registered Agora International Ltd in the Isle of Man, where the company was administered (and nominally owned) by one of the many lawyers servicing offshore companies.

From there it was fairly straightforward for Guess and O'Donnell to get their hands on the dough. On one day in March 1995 the pair flew from Heathrow to Douglas at 9.05am and returned on the 2.25pm flight having picked up the first of a number of £20,000 cash withdrawals from the Douglas branch of the Allied Irish Bank, O'Donnell signing the receipt.

More money left the account over the following months as the ever-amenable offshore bankers happily handed over bundles of notes worth £2,000 to Agora's agents for posting back to the UK. All told, documents seen by the *Eye* show that at least £100,000 left the account in cash over two and a half years. On top of that, tens of thousands was transferred to an Agora account in Wimbledon on O'Donnell's instructions and £25,000 was used to set up a mysterious Swedish Krone account in Jersey.

Not only might the taxman be interested in the offshore manoeuvre, so will others who worked on the deal and were short-changed. When the Sergel City development was called off professionals brought in by Agora, not knowing that cash was disappearing through the offshore set-up, settled for significantly less than they were due for work they had already done. Disappointed creditors included Guess's own firm HTC and an architect who was around £60,000 out of pocket.

With the scam complete O'Donnell was in the mood for celebration, as a note from his British accountant Roy O'Gorman of Leigh Carr in 1999 revealed. "Dear Tom," wrote the beancounter. "Thank you for an excellent dinner – my turn for the next one when Agora is struck off. See you soon, Roy." Sure enough Agora International *(UK) Ltd* was wound up and O'Donnell and Guess, duly enriched, closed the door on the episode – or so they hoped. Neither returned the *Eye's* calls to discuss the affair.

Empire Property Group is chaired by 35-year old Rolls-Royce and Ferrari-driving businessman Hayden Chittell. The firm has contracts as far a field as Russia, China and the Bahamas to go with its Ilford skyscraper. Yet although it claims to have a "UK base" and boasts of the work of "Empire Property Group (International) Ltd" on Pioneer Point (which remains just a hole in the ground six months after "ground-breaking"), Companies House records show there is no company with that name, suggesting that O'Donnell and Co's offshore shenanigans aren't over yet.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Coup what a non-event

THE 23 October appeal court ruling in London on the case Equatorial Guinea tried to bring against those it said were the masterminds of an alleged mercenary plot in 2004 would have made curious reading for all those who thought they were familiar with the story.

From the acres of newsprint, documentaries, a film and even a book, the verdict had been clear for months – these men were guilty, and the tiny oil-rich Central African country had been the victim of a wicked conspiracy by public school-educated spivs as greedy as they were thick.

Strangely, however, much of the media ignored the conclusion of Sir Anthony Clarke, the Master of the Rolls, and two fellow judges to support an earlier, equally unreported high vourt verdict – that there was no case to answer. They ruled that the action – redrafted seven times by Equatorial Guinea's team – had been wrong in law, and that all alleged losses suffered by Equatorial Guinea were in any case a result of Equatorial Guinea's own actions, rather than any alleged conspiracy. All costs were awarded against Equatorial Guinea. How much former Pennington's solicitor Henry Page has been charging President Obiang to pursue this doomed action is not clear, although according to court documents his travel expenses alone were more than €700,000 (c. £468,000) and fees for an assistant for six months a further €350,000.

Equatorial Guinea has also lost costly actions against the alleged plotters in Guernsey and Lebanon. In South Africa, from where the operation was said to have been launched, prosecutors have offered plea bargains to all the accused rather than have evidence tested in open court. In Zimbabwe, where the mercenaries were apparently caught red-handed, no charge relating to any form of conspiracy was ever brought. Only in Equatorial Guinea, where torture is commonplace, were guilty verdicts on substantive charges delivered.

How could the media be so wrong? The story seemed too good to be true – a crazed black dictator, seedy white aristocrats, greasy foreigners. Even Mark Thatcher. As we now know, it was indeed too good to be true. The version peddled by freelance spooks in South Africa and Equatorial Guinea and their well-spoken lawyer was riddled with conveniently ignored inconsistencies, lies and inadmissible evidence. But it may have been enough to obscure the real question as to what South Africa and Equatorial Guinea really knew about the conspiracy and when they knew it – and what role they had played in egging it on for their own ends.

WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS

Blasted Heath

THAT no fewer than nine murder convictions involving former Home Office pathologist Michael Heath are under review by the Criminal Cases Review Commission will come as no surprise to *Eye* readers, long familiar with his contentious work.

The only surprise is that it took so long – and so many cases – before anyone acted.

Even then it was only after five leading pathologists joined together to overturn one wrongful conviction for murder – that of Steven Puaca, wrongly jailed in 2002 for killing his girlfriend who had in fact died of an overdose – and to then formally complain that the Home Office held disciplinary proceedings. Its criticism of Heath led to his resignation in September.

Heath had been a forensic pathologist since 1977, yet he was not admitted to the Royal College of Forensic Pathologists until 1989 – because he repeatedly failed his exams. He then went on to be involved in some of the country's most high profile cases, including the conviction of Michael Stone for the murder of Lin Russell and her daughter, Megan (now under review), as well as the death of Stuart Lubbock, found dead in Michael Barrymore's swimming pool.

Yet alarm bells should have been ringing about his evidence since the early 1990s. Questions were raised about his claims wrongly implicating Sheila Bowler in the murder by drowning in 1992 of her aging aunt, Flo Jackson. After four years in prison for a crime which never was, Sheila Bowler was acquitted at a retrial in February 1998. The Crown did not rely on Heath's evidence at the retrial.

There followed other cases the *Eye* has highlighted, including that of Simon Hall who was jailed for the murder of an elderly neighbour though having a cast-iron alibi for all but half an hour of the night Joan Albert was killed. Heath, the pathologist, did not attend the scene and did not carry out the post-mortem examination until 11 hours after the body was found and said it was not possible to estimate the time of death. A gastro-enterologist, however, suggested she had died at a time when Simon Hall was partying in Ipswich with friends.

Then there was the case of Victor Boreman and Michael and Malcolm Byrne, cleared earlier this year of the murder of their neighbour who was found dead after a fire in his flat. Heath alone had suggested that the dead man may have drowned in his own blood from a head wound suffered in a fight with the three men. Other experts said smoke in his lungs showed he had died of asphyxia from the fire which occurred several hours later.

Four cases, including the Stone conviction, have been referred to the CCRC officials by defence lawyers since Heath has been at the centre of controversy. The commission has also picked up another five cases of 54 that involved Heath where time of death and pathology are central.

● **GOOD NEWS for Susan May who everyone (except the criminal justice system) accepts was wrongly convicted of killing her elderly aunt 14 years ago.**

As *Eye* readers will recall, while waiting to learn if the Criminal Cases Review Commission will send her case back to the appeal court, Mrs May was pursued by a solicitor (who once briefly but inadequately acted for her) over an alleged unpaid bill of £2,800.

While she was in jail, the solicitor, Ian Brown, of Manchester firm Lomax Geddes, had managed to get a charge against her home to secure the debt. Unhappy with her monthly payments of £10, he was seeking to force her to sell her home to get his money.

At Oldham county court district Judge Fox has just thrown out the claim, adding that had it been down to him, he may well not have allowed a charge to go on Mrs May's house in the first place.

metrix

Preparing them for a future they cannot yet imagine

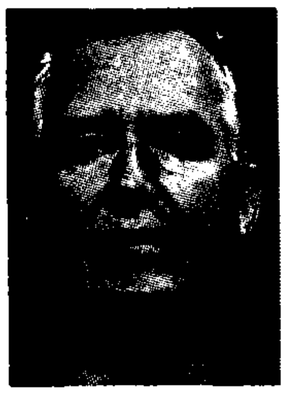
DEFENCE TRAINING

Motley screwed?

A CONSORTIUM known as Metrix has emerged as favourite for at least one of the two defence training PFI contracts reckoned to be worth around £19bn. But who is behind the snappily-named outfit set to be handed access to much of Britain's military technology and be relied upon to prepare the armed forces for operations for at least 15 years?

Providing the computer capability is – uh, oh! – **EDS**. The company's record of screwing up the Child Support Agency, the Inland Revenue's tax credits and more recently the forces' own personnel administration system seems only to have recommended itself to MoD bosses.

Other consortium members include: **Qinetiq,** 30 percent-owned by US investment fund Carlyle, which acquired the shares on the cheap five years ago through the part-privatisation of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency; and **Augusta Westlands**, bought by Italian defence giant Finmeccanica two years ago. Success for Metrix would represent an early success for Finmeccanica director Lord Bach, who as defence procurement minister in the last parliament approved the fortuitous Augusta acquisition.



And who could doubt the credentials of US defence conglomerate **Raytheon**? Among the blots on the company's copy book are: conviction for illegally obtaining classified documents (1990); overcharging on government contracts (1994); compensation to a competitor for spying (1999); $410m settlement with investors over false accounts (2004); and the admission of chief executive William Swanson this year that his book "Swanson's Unwritten Rules Of Management" was largely plagiarised.

Private education company **Nord Anglia** secures a berth despite financial troubles and a questionable record privatising schools in several local authorities. In September last year it was forced to lay off 100 staff and flog its headquarters as it lost money on a chain of nurseries.

And no consortium would be complete without one of Britain's finest outsourcers, in this case **Serco** – the firm that earlier this year admitted that its dismal performance on prisoner tagging only improved when it was threatened with swingeing penalties.

Metrix has the crucial cabinet-level backing of Welsh Secretary Peter Hain. The consortium will be based at the RAF's St Athan site in South Wales and use a £100m "super-hangar" that the MoD built just before the aircraft repairs it was designed for were moved out. Though extremely unpopular with MoD staff, the move would therefore spare some blushes, even it means handing over training of the country's armed forces to the most motley of crews.

BP

More trouble in the pipeline?

FOLLOWING a huge oil spill in Alaska and an explosion at a Texan refinery which killed 15 workers and injured hundreds, BP's safety record in the US is unravelling faster than you can say "Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan pipeline".

And as the company comes under intense scrutiny in the US courts and Congress, campaigners in the UK who tried to blow the whistle on BP's dodgy construction practices on the 1,000-mile BTC oil pipeline from Azerbaijan to Turkey are hoping they may now be taken seriously too.

The British government sees the BTC project, largely funded by UK taxpayers, as central to Britain's energy security for the next 40 years. However, since 2002 it has ignored well-documented claims by a group of BP employees, consultants, scientists and oil executives that New Labour's favourite oil firm is covering up an in-built safety flaw on the pipeline which, if uncorrected, will rapidly corrode and cause serious environmental damage.

	1.0% Strain		1.7% Strain		3.0% Strain	
	1A	1B	2A	2B	3A	3B
HBE 95	Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail
SPC 2888	Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail
Protegol 32.10T	Pass	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Fail

Advantica Technology confidential report

In 2004 the Commons trade and industry select committee called for written submissions from the whistleblowers but then inexplicably dropped the matter.

Submissions from Derek Mortimore, a corrosion consultant who was sacked by BP after he raised the alarm, and Dr John Leeds, a corrosion scientist, explained how BP had selected an anti-corrosion paint that was not up to the job of sealing and protecting the 60,000 welds on the pipeline.

When the sealant (SPC 2888) cracked on application in late 2003, BP at first hid the failure from a consortium of government and private lenders who were about to release U$2.6bn for the project. BP eventually persuaded governments that its buried pipeline was safe because the sealant had been rigorously tested.

ADVANTICA

But the *Eye* has seen a copy of the "confidential" BP test report on the sealant that was not disclosed to the select committee or lenders. It reveals that the sealant had failed key performance tests a full year before it was used on the welds.

Advantica Technologies, the privatised research arm of British Gas, tested the sealant along with three rivals in July 2002. The report concludes that SPC consistently failed to perform well in all ten tests and had actually performed "poorly" on key ones.

A BP memo attached to the Advantica report accepted that there was a "question" over SPC's ability to adhere. But the memo also reveals that BP simply "omitted" the bad results from the ranking table, thus allowing SPC to come first.

One rival company was so alarmed it immediately commissioned the same Advantica scientists to retest for adhesion and flexibility. SPC "failed" both tests. It came off the plastic-coated steel pipe in large pieces and showed poor flexibility, snapping too readily. Either failure would have disqualified its use in the UK.

In March 2004 an exasperated Mortimore wrote to Lord Browne, chief executive of BP: "I have never before witnessed a situation where the client proceeded with construction when he knew that a significant element of the works was going to fail and had evidence in his hand of such failure a year before construction started."

Lord Browne refused to meet Mortimore; and the same sealant is being used on a parallel gas pipeline due for completion next year.

Whistleblowers and MPs from all parties are hoping that the people's peer will be put on the spot over the BTC pipeline and that the trade and industry secretary will finish the investigation it started.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

Slater Walker... The Final Instalment

THE untold story of the Slater Walker crisis 30 years ago is how a panic-stricken Bank of England was bluffed and bullied into propping up a bankrupt bank while lobbying against any full investigation or prosecution of the most influential financier of his time, Jim Slater.

Documents obtained by *Private Eye* from the Bank and the Treasury under the Freedom of Information Act for the first time detail how the equivalent today of up to £700m was secretly provided to keep Slater Walker Securities afloat in October 1975; why the Bank was persuaded over the next two years to keep reaching for its cheque book; and how it finally overpaid to buy the Slater Walker bank so as to end its fear of an embarrassing scandal.

The Bank of England admitted it had been "overtaken" by events in Singapore in summer 1975 which saw an investigation launched into Slater Walker. When Slater suddenly decided in October 1975 to resign, the Bank felt it had to secretly back the new board headed by Slater's handpicked successor, business partner and fellow shareholder Jimmy Goldsmith, despite internal doubts about his suitability.

The Bank provided an initial facility of up to £130m – more than its own capital and reserves and worth more than £700m today – to cover any run on the Slater Walker Limited bank. This was reduced a month later to £70m but with a guarantee of £40m to cover bad loans of which there were far too many, especially to Slater-linked companies.

None of this was announced publicly. The Treasury and the Labour government were informed after the fact. Bank officials were told to give a "categorical 'no'" if asked by the media whether money had been loaned to Slater Walker. "The full extent of the Bank of England's interest in this situation and indeed the degree of exposure of this bank is not publicly realized," the Bank's non-executive directors were told in December 1975. "So far our involvement has been kept secret and I need hardly emphasize that we aim to keep it so," declared an official.

The Bank's nervousness about informing the Treasury was understandable. An October 1975 note by a senior treasury official talked of the "history of City characters who have come a cropper and whom the Bank may have misjudged" and that the Bank was "up to their necks in the Slater Walker affair". It was a "sorry history".

But once it had bailed out SWS the Bank could never say no to Goldsmith without triggering not just the "crisis of confidence" in the City which had motivated its initial decision but also questions about why it had secretly pumped in so much money which could now be lost.

This became painfully clear to the governor Gordon, now Lord Richardson, and his closest colleagues (George Blunden, Rodney Galpin, John Fforde, Sir Jasper Hollom – some of whom preferred liquidation) within weeks. It emerged that default repayment of two "stupid" borrowings issued by SWS was about to be triggered by the fast evaporating group assets. SWS could not meet a demand for repayment and so faced imminent liquidation. That could see the liquidator calling the Bank guarantee in full and probably writing off the more than £25m SWL owed by end December 1975.

"We cannot step aside completely," declared a senior Bank official. This would "raise again in Whitehall and in Parliament the whole question of the nature of banking supervision on which we achieved agreement from the Government to a satisfactory solution only with difficulty earlier this year," he wrote in November 1975. "Given the risks of an official enquiry into the group and of what might emerge" liquidation might still be preferable. But the Bank helped ensure there was no investigation.

The governor was advised that "it is better to keep the group alive". If it went under, the loss could be at least £40m which "would have a major effect on our reserves". A treasury official noted the governor's view that an SWS collapse would put the bank's capital and reserves of £118m "seriously at risk". It would be necessary to "forego our dividend for some years".

Liquidation would also cause "incalculable" damage to the Bank's reputation. So another £14m was provided in December 1975 to repay a £3.5m loan stock and a $21m loan. This money was repaid two months later from asset sales.

Bank officials now realised that "it will be difficult to see at what point or at what figure the bank would withdraw further support". A secret December 1975 memo records a meeting between the governor and Chancellor Denis Healey at which the governor stressed "the importance of keeping knowledge of what was happening to a close circle". Only a handful of senior treasury civil servants were to be in the loop. The Treasury and Healey were said to have given "at least their tacit blessing". Almost two years later the Treasury view was still that Slater Walker was a subject the Bank "have kept very much to themselves". For good reason.

But it was not long into 1976 before Goldsmith and merchant banker co-directors Ivor Kennington from Rothschilds and Peter Hill-Wood from Hambros (now the Arsenal chairman) were warning of further defaults risking liquidation unless either more money was pumped in by the Bank or, as became the Goldsmith preferred option, the Bank took over SWL but at a generous price.

The Bank was told by Goldsmith's messengers that it had a "moral commitment". The Eurodollar market could be hit. Demands were made for a further £64m. The Bank agreed to SWL funding more loan stock purchases.

Each time Goldsmith played the liquidation card the Bank reeled at the thought of accounting publicly for its secret support operation and then being involved in litigation with the liquidator. Having helped to bail out the first loan stock holders, it now feared it would be accused of supporting SWS investors and face claims for unfair treatment from those hit by liquidation.

In September 1976 the Bank's support operation for Slater Walker was made public. It now had no option but to continue its support and avoid liquidation almost at all costs. Realizing the Bank's weakness and as a gambler used to bluffing big, Goldsmith pressed the Bank to buy SWL to make the problem go away.

By end December 1976 SWL owed the Bank of England £54m – around £250m in today's money. A provision of £20m was made against expected losses. Its total failure would have reduced the annual payment made to the Treasury by £3m-£4m a year for several years. Hardly likely to please Chancellor Healey who was then struggling to keep GB Limited afloat.

By mid-1977 the fear was that liquidation would be triggered by a looming £90m loan stock default. But as so often with Goldsmith, he over-played his hand. The Bank refused to be bullied into paying £26m for the bankrupt bank just to avoid liquidation for SWS.

Eventually in August 1977 a deal was agreed. But it was still more favorable to Goldsmith and SWS than to the Bank and its owners, the taxpayer. The Bank bought SWL for £3.5m cash – an increase on its previous offer of £1.5m but less than the £5m Goldsmith wanted. It also bought the empty Oyez House office block in Fetter Lane and 130 acres at Wokingham in Berkshire for £6.5m plus a £7.5m mortgage. And acquired a $10m loan note from the Slater-linked US company, Cornwall Equities. Furthermore it paid SWS £3m for tax losses in the event that SWL ever made money.

The Bank accepted it was paying £5m more than the assets were worth. But it was afraid of liquidation and resulting criticism from Goldsmith. He only failed to push through an even more unfavorable deal when it was rejected by the Bank's non-executives – an unusual and embarrassing defeat for the Governor. Under that

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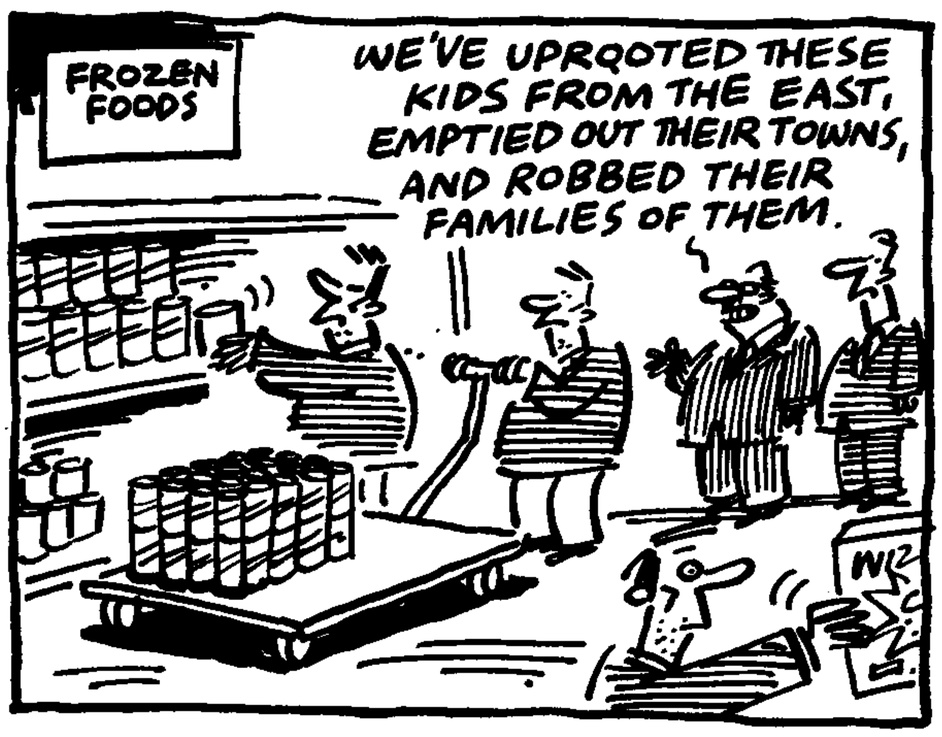
THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG



deal the Bank would have paid £26m for the properties, given SWS an option to share in any profits and to buy back 20 percent of SWL. An indication of how desperate the Bank had become.

But the final deal was still one that – like the initial decision to bail out SWS and head off any Department of Trade probe – worked far more to the advantage of Goldsmith and Slater than to the public.

The Treasury's view was that after the first loan stock bail out there was "an inescapable commitment". There was, said the Bank, "no alternative". The governor feared "severe criticism… for deciding to pull the plug on a concern they had propped up". Richardson admitted to Healey in June 1977 his "disappointment" that matters had not worked out as forecast. But at least the bill was smaller than had they done nothing. Richardson had made it clear he was merely keeping Healey "informed rather than seeking your approval", in the words of a *treasury note* ahead of their meeting. "The responsibility is his alone."

It took almost another 20 years for the Bank to extricate itself from Slater Walker. Some £60m in loans to former directors and others remained to be pursued. Most yielded very little. But the properties eventually generated profits of more than £7m. Cornwall went into Chapter 11 bankruptcy proceedings and the Bank ended up with shares in a US store chain which paid out some $2m. It then had to sue SWS – now called Britannia Arrow – in 1988 to enforce a 1979 guarantee against loss on the $10m it paid plus interest. It collected almost £6m. A first dividend of £30m was paid by SWL in 1989 followed by a further £19.5m when the liquidation was completed in 1996.

Twenty years after it first intervened the Bank of England had avoided the apocalypse it feared and probably recovered most of the money it invested. Just how big a loss it took is unclear even now.

Thanks to the Bank of England Goldsmith survived and went on to become a billionaire corporate raider. Slater escaped with a derisory fine (£15 for each of 15 offences) for breaching the Companies Act by using Slater Walker millions to buy its own shares. He also avoided extradition to Singapore unlike his lieutenant, Richard Tarling, who did time in Changi jail. The Department of Trade overlooked three other possible grounds for prosecuting "Changi Jim" and others. The Director of Public Prosecutions also dropped a possible case.

Why was Slater Walker treated so favorably by the Bank of England and the Labour government? Slater had made money for many in the City and in parliament who would not have relished a full investigation. City regulators had been warned but done nothing. In addition to Goldsmith's friends in Downing Street – Prime Minister Harold Wilson and his influential personal secretary Marcia, Baroness Falkender – there was leading Tory Peter now Lord Walker – the other half of Slater Walker. One of Slater's former investment clients was former Prime Minister Ted Heath.

Nobody wanted the Slater Walker can of worms opened. So it stayed firmly closed and "Changi Jim" continues to be a director of listed companies and hailed by those with short memories as an investment guru.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 326

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 17 Nov 2006

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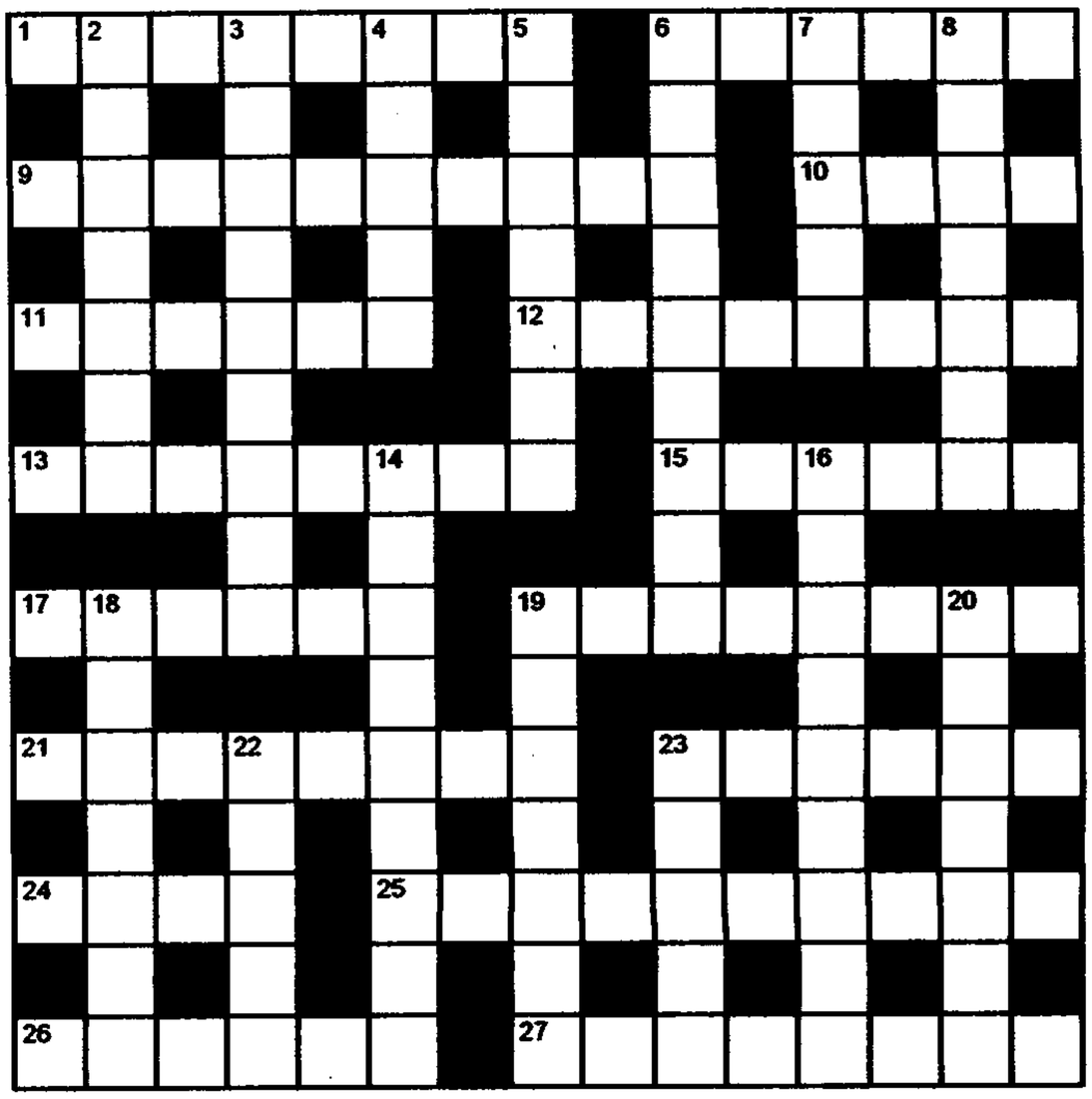

ACROSS

1 Me, acting uncannily like a great puller of babes? (8)

6 As the police's young black victim was South American, Sun editorial much reduced? (6)

9 Formidable old farm worker who'll make you stiff (4,6)

10 Curse of Hello's ultimate hat trick (4)

11 Don't get down a bottomless ravine with an erection (4,2)

12 Grope out of place: 'e's penetrated (3,1,4)

13 Posh uses crap make-up, right? (8)

15 Toff entertained by Paris, topless! (6)

17 Di's out getting screwed by a film maker (6)

19 Like Gordon Brown's outdated tax – misconceived shit (8)

21 Where Olav gets pissed with saki? (8)

23 Sound of happy slurp of tongue (6)

24 Account of some perisher in round money (4)

25 Whirling dervish has behind that produces a through motion (10)

26 Wild hen party, skirts removed to take part in a tabloid sting? (6)

27 Member, nuts about stealing (8)

DOWN

2 Blimp broadcasts with fruity thing (7)

3/19 "INSTITUTE BLOKE UP TO NO GOOD WITH ARTIFICIAL HIP AGAINST GIRL'S TOP" – News of the Screws speciality (6,3,7)

4 Willy's head buried in pert bust – tosser! (5)

5 Unoriginal hack's submission on "pussy" (7)

6 Members backing 'the old man' and party getting suddenly dropped as a punishment (9)

7 Take off second big girl's blouse (5)

8 Measure energy consumed by tart about to solicit (7)

14 Aroused in the club (7,2)

16 He's thin, broken by sex and likely to get a bollocking (2,3,4)

18 Fundamentalists' match reported by Boycott (7)

19 See 3dn.

20 Bad to adopt Kennedy's lead, getting as much as one can drink (7)

22 One who makes one cross, being oddly over protective of Tories' leader? (5)

23 Pick up Glaxo's head director (5)

Crossword 325 winner: BRIAN ENGLISH

ACROSS: 1 Scrubber 6 Nobel 10 Reams 11 Lithuania 12 Garrison 13 Brunei 15 Thing 16 Kim Il Sung 18 Patagonia 20 Attic 22 Rustic 24 Smackers 25 Electable 27 House 28 Udder 29 Get a life.

DOWN: 2 Chairlift 3 Upswing 5/26 Ratbag 6 Neutral 7 Benin 8 Leaking 9/4 A right bollocking 14 Embalmment 17 Up the duff 18 Parvenu 19 Glitter 20 Alcohol 21 Casket 23 Speed.

Number crunchings

£3.3m ■ Losses due to terrorist scare for which Ryanair is suing government

€330m ■ Profits for Ryanair in six months including terrorist scare

HUSBAND
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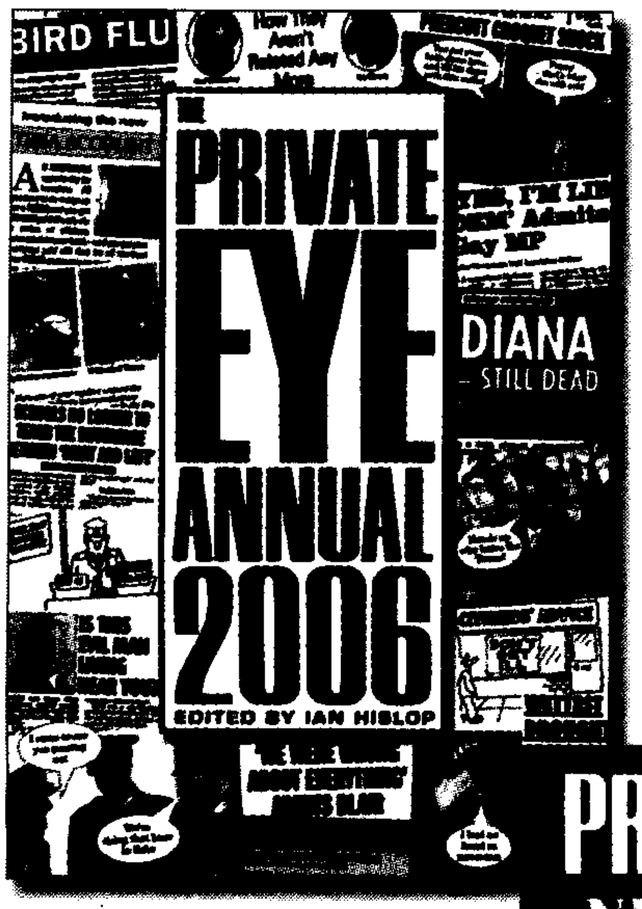
Blimey, probably just get absolutely pissed
So you'd carry on as normal
Yeah

Private Eye Christmas Books



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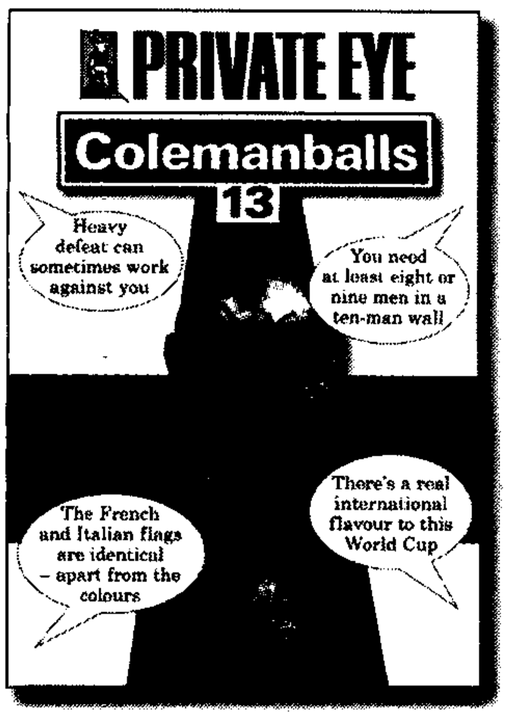
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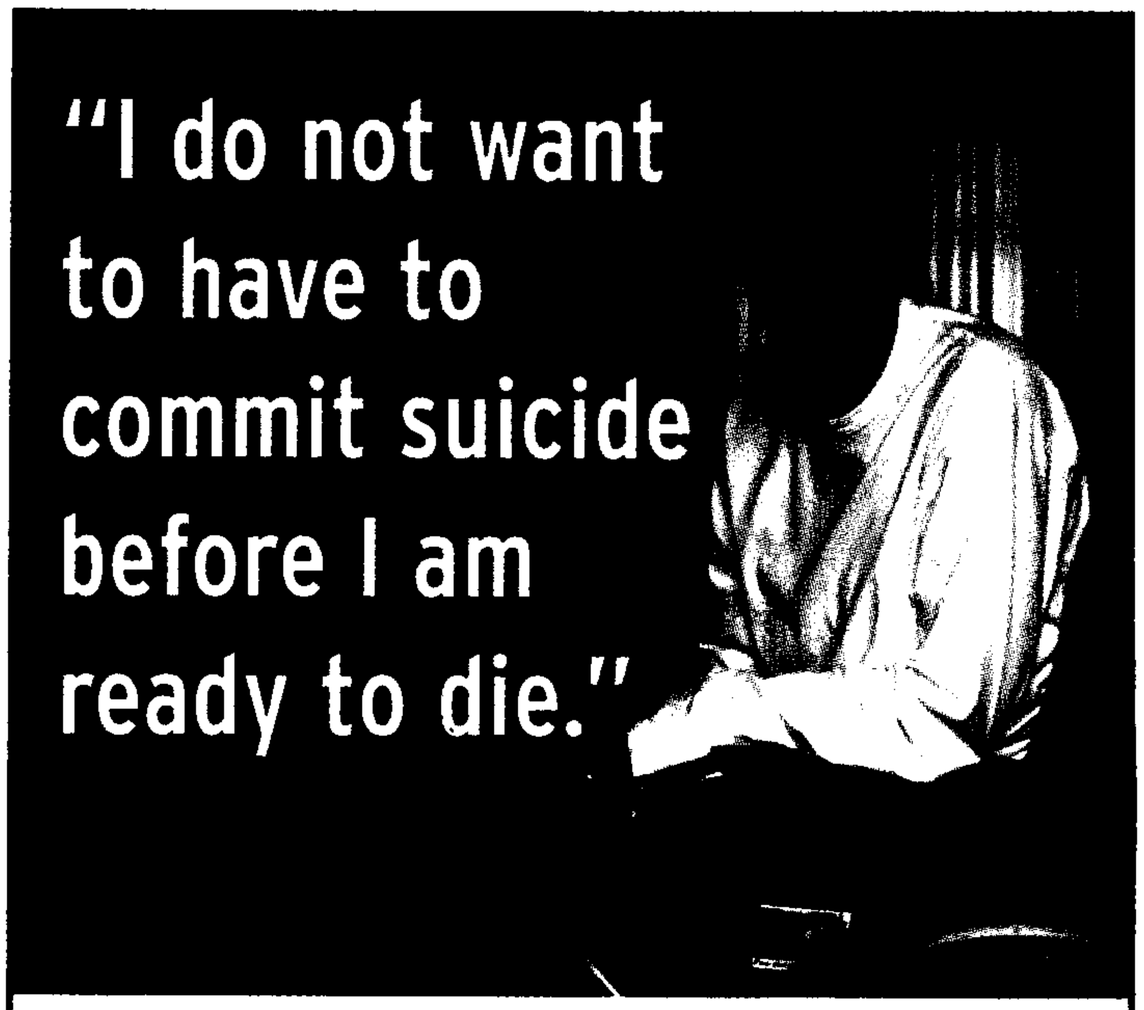

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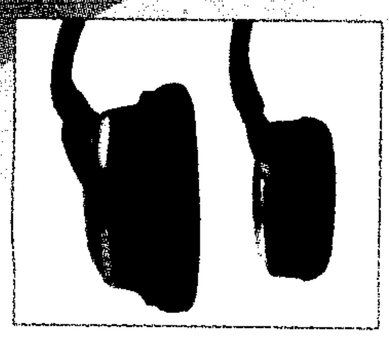

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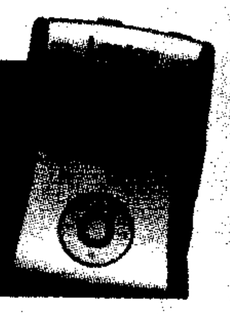

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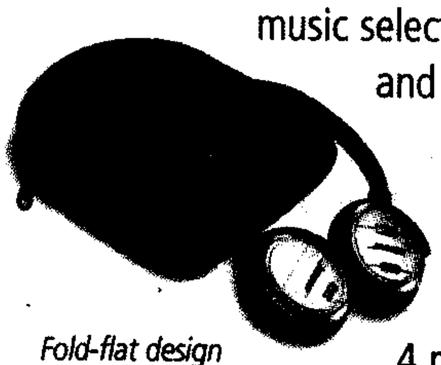

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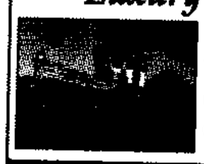
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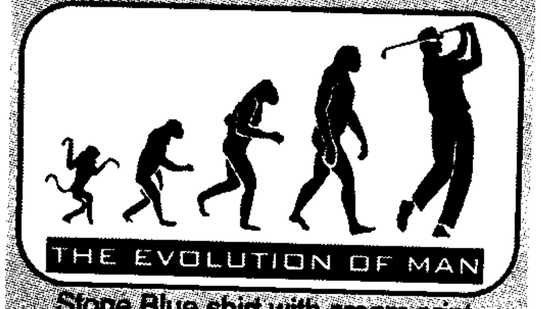

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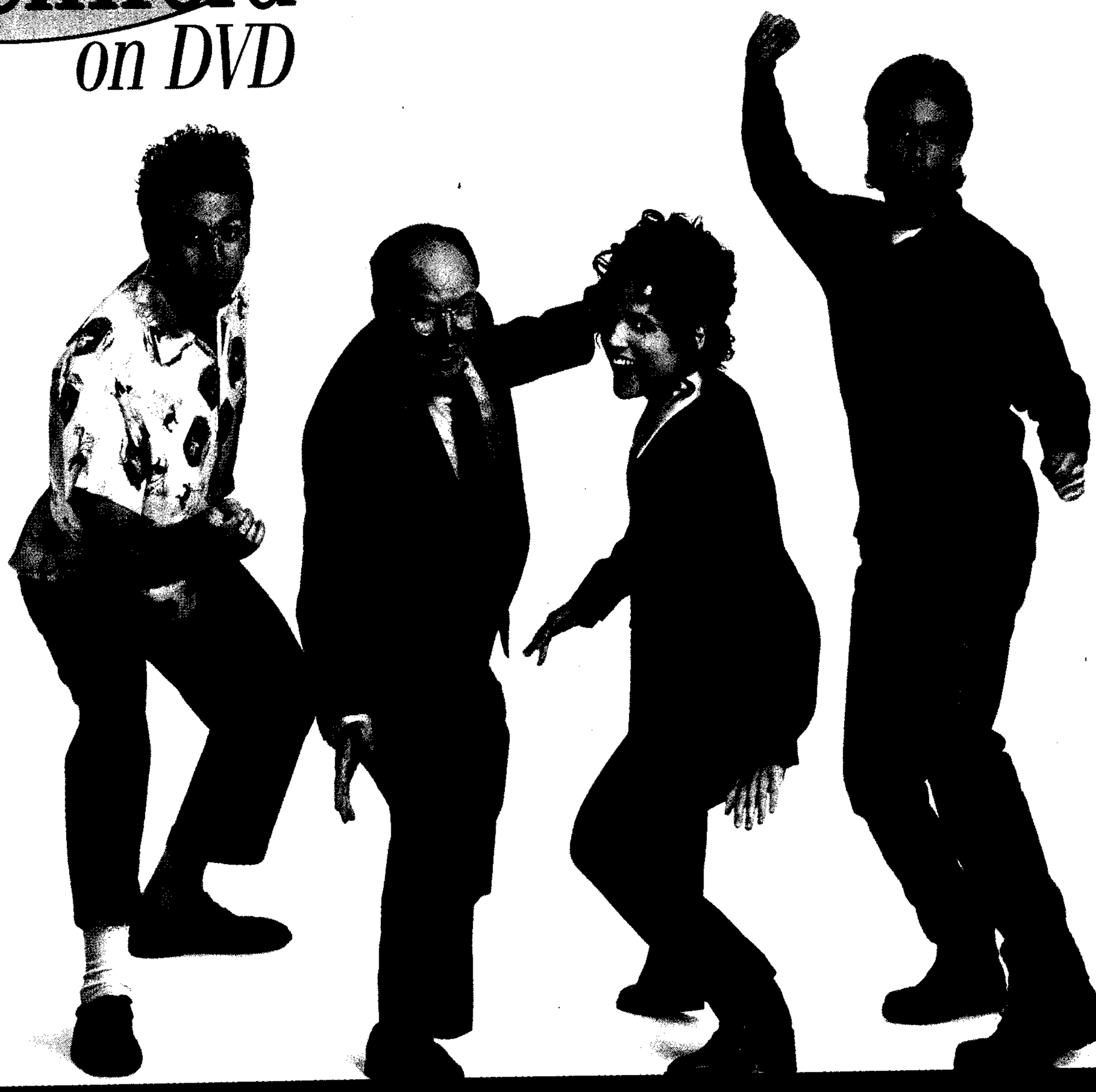

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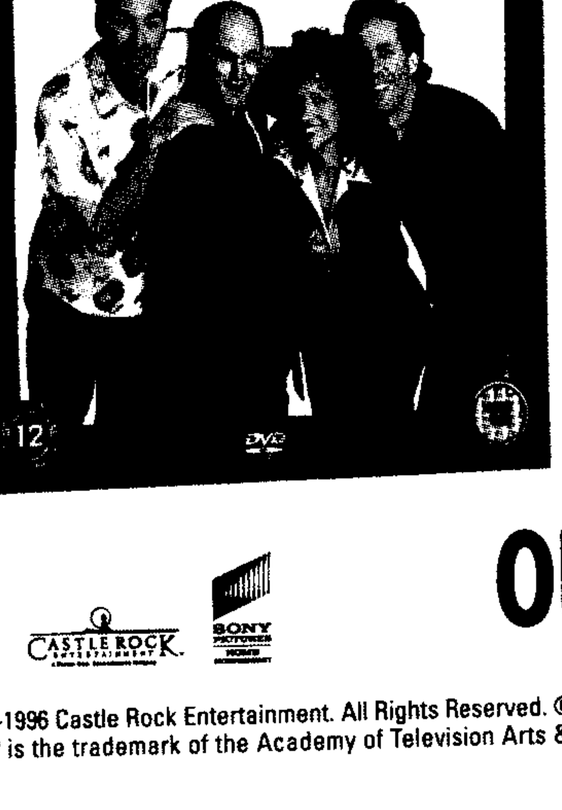

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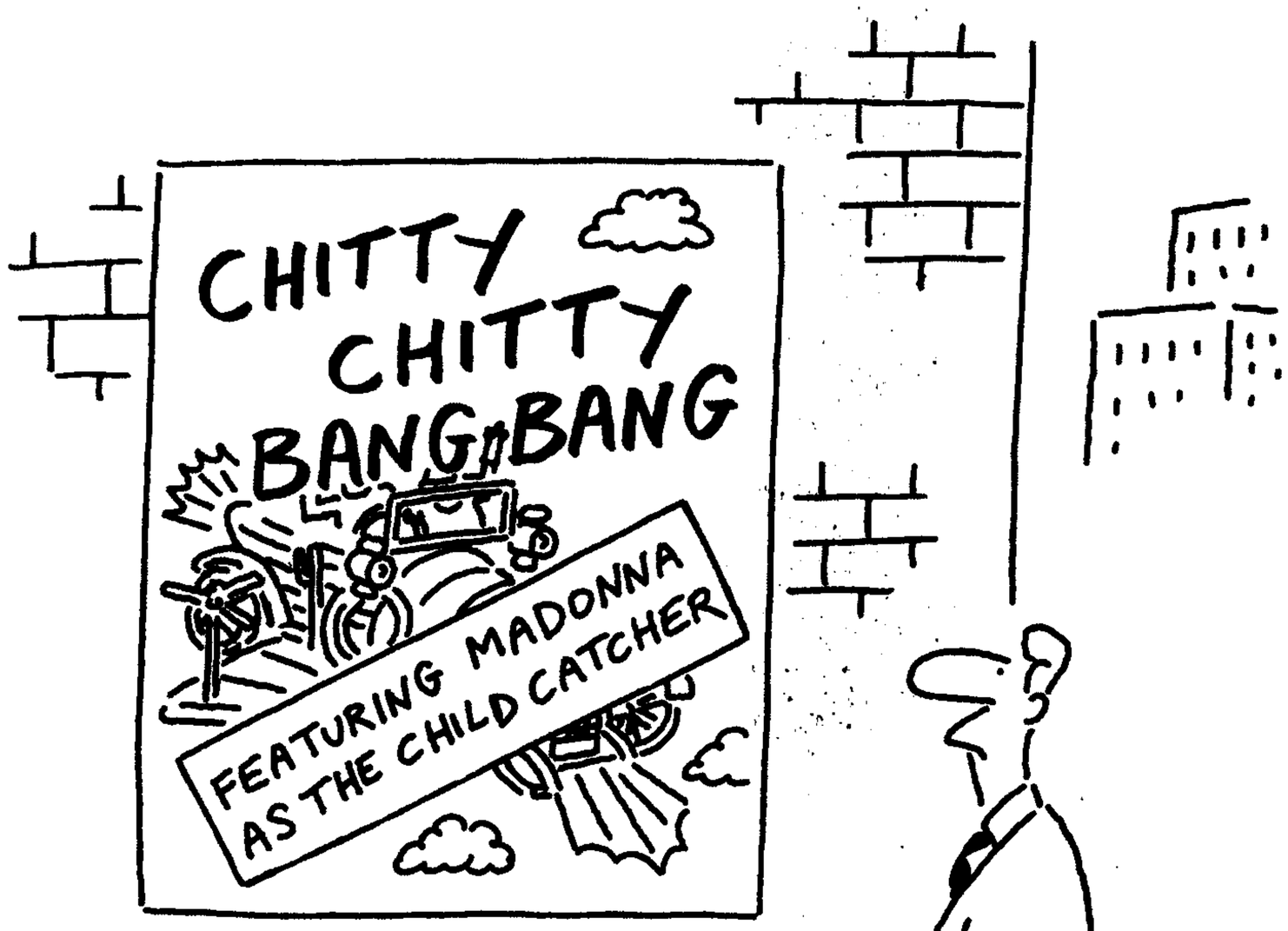

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